



## THE POETRY OF VALMIKI



# THE POETRY OF VALMIKI

A LITERARY APPRECIATION OF THE  
BEST PARTS OF THE RAMAYANA

MASTI VENKATESA IYENGAR

1940

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## PREFACE

THE Ramayana is a major item in the heritage of India yet by the irony of our linguistic wealth and educational history the average graduate of an Indian University who is sure to have studied at least one play of Shakespeare and some poetry in English literature of great poets like Keats and Wordsworth and of poets less great like Campbell or Herrick generally makes no acquaintance with the poetry of Valmiki. He may even be acquainted with some work of the Greek poet Homer in a translation but not of him who has been called the Homer of India. Not only is any part of the work of Valmiki not prescribed for study—it is conceivable that this may not be always possible—but the poet is not even referred to in general disquisitions on the nature of poetry or the meaning of literature. Those who follow an older fashion hear the poem expounded in public recitals. Modernisation has deprived the younger generation of this opportunity also. Indian youth to day thus often finishes its educational career in profound ignorance of the nature and worth of the greatest poetry the nation has inherited.

This at any rate was the case with me when I graduated and I do not believe that my case was exceptional. Indeed if it was exceptional it was in the contrary direction. Born into a family in which the Ramayana was read every day I heard the sounds of Valmiki's composition before ever I understood any words. Later I read summaries of



I must confess that I have not the scholarship in Sanskrit that I should have liked to possess for writing this appreciation of Valmiki. Deeper scholarship however has so far concerned itself with the Ramayana in a way different from that which would meet my purpose. Close study of the Ramayana raises a number of fascinating problems and these problems engage scholars too deeply to let them discourse at any length on the poem as such. Much of that criticism besides is written for scholars and not for the general reader and takes a knowledge of the Ramayana in the details of character incident and description for granted. When it is written by Western authors it is often vitiated for the Indian reader by a superiority complex which is a little too painfully obvious. When written by an Indian it tries to satisfy standards supposed to be set by Western masters and becomes equally recondite. The approach that would meet the need I have in view is that of the common student and I have done the best I could to meet that need with the knowledge I possess. I have for this reason not feared seeming elementary and have narrated the story and discussed the characters and conveyed information without hesitation.

I should also like to state here that the views about interpolations in the present text of the Ramayana are the result of my own examination of the subject confirmed or not later by reference to views expressed by others. Persons of an orthodox turn of mind are likely to feel that this type of opinion is blindly copied by men with modern education from Western critics. I can only give the assurance that I have not



blindly accepted Western views any more than Eastern views. I have tried to see my way with the light that is given to me. Errors of judgment are possible in such a case, but they are not due to imitation or want of care.

Besides the books mentioned in the appendix, I have referred, in studying the topics dealt with in this appreciation of the Ramayana, to that excellent little book "*The Riddle of the Ramayana*" by Rao Bahadur C V Vaidya and to articles on the versions of the Ramayana current in Greater India by Prof K A Neelakanta Sastri of the University of Madras in "*Tivven*", an English Journal published from Madras, and similar articles by Mr Nippani Ranga Rao in the Kannada Magazine "*Jeevana*" published from Dharwar. I have referred to other notes all of which I cannot now specify. I hereby acknowledge my debt to all these authors.

My thanks are due to three friends, Messrs T Venkatarangan, V Seetharamiah and K Revanna, who have helped me in seeing press proofs of the book.

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# THE POETRY OF VALMIKI

## I INTRODUCTORY

*Adi Ka ya* first poem

VALMIKI'S *Ramayana* has been called India's first poem. It has been suggested that this title was given to it in consideration not of its being the first poetic composition in Sanskrit but of its being the first among *Sarga Bandha Kavās*. This might have been the case but there is not sufficient reason for believing that it was. The book should have been among the earliest of all major poetic compositions whether divided into *sargas* or not so divided. From the time that the story of Rama was first told by Valmiki it has been dear to the heart of the generations of India. Many a poet repeated the story in his own words in Sanskrit and in the provincial languages. The poem has been put into various non Indian languages also. The material has thus been repeated by many poets and repeated often yet it cannot be said that the story has been better told by any one than by Valmiki. When men originally called the *Ramayana* the first poem they thought possibly of its order in time. Later they discovered that it was first also in order of merit. The introductory verses that go with current versions of the *Ramayana* show the great esteem in which men held the poet and his work. To Valmiki the *Kokila* runs a verse in this introduction seated on the

branches of the tree of poesy and calling Rama, Rama, in soft and mellifluous notes, I do obeisance " Another verse in the introduction says "So long as on this earth the hills and rivers endure so long shall the Ramayana be current in the worlds " The poem was thought of as the great support of all poets Valmiki was accepted as the fore-runner, leader and master of the race of poets, and his poem as the very crest of poetic achievement

### POETRY AND RELIGION

When Valmiki wrote his poem, religion and poetry appear not to have been different entities This is a position observed in the early history of all nations When, however, the poem became popular and its great ideas won men's reverence, and when the leaders of populations discovered that it worked for moral good, it ceased to be a mere poem and came to be thought of as a vehicle of religious and moral instruction As part of the same process, Rama, who was first conceived as king and noble-hearted hero, became an incarnation of God So incomparable did his great qualities seem and so beloved had he become. The Ramayana thus became a religious book recording the story of a divine incarnation Centuries have passed since and to-day the Ramayana is merely a religious book All will admit that it is also a great poem But because it is a great religious book it has followed that adherents of a particular religion treat it as their property and those of other religions treat it as not theirs The Ramayana to-day is thus a poem teaching *Sanathana Dharma* in a beautiful manner

Great is the accession of honour that comes to a book by recognition of this kind. To no poem that is merely a poem will people show such reverence. The Ramayana became with the Indian people a holy bible for daily study. Men worshipped it as the history of an incarnation and learnt to think of any criticism of it as blasphemy. This was all to the good but by way of compensation those who did not accept Vishnu or the Hindu conception of God treated the book as the text of a sect. A poem that should have been current in the worlds was confined to one land and even in that land to one section of the people. This was grievous loss from the point of view of the poem as of the poet. He who should have been an emperor became the king of a land and later the headman of a village. A poem which should have been of use in the lives of hundreds of thousands by this shrinkage of allegiance influences far smaller numbers. This was loss from the point of view of the world also and from the point of view of religion and morality. All the teachers professing ten religions and a hundred sects teach the one law. What they teach in the name of their religion and their sect poetry teaches without mentioning religion and sect. If poetry remains poetry it does this in the hearts of all. To the extent to which it becomes a religious text to that extent its work is hindered. This is what has happened with the Ramayana.

### THE OUTLOOK OF THIS STUDY

It is proposed in this essay to study the Ramayana as mainly a poem. This attitude is not the outcome

either of religion or anti-religion. There is properly speaking a religion of poetry as mighty as any that goes by that name. To minds that know that religion it will appear, religion and anti-religion to treat a poem as anything other than a poem. Where is Valmiki and where is any one religion so called? Where is the Ramayana and where is any one sect? Where is poetry and where is mere morality? Poet and poetry include religion and sect and morality but do not end with them. It is also far better that a poem should be the fourth of its class than the first of religious books. The text of the Gita that says that even destruction if met in the pursuit of one's own *dharma* is desirable and that moving in another's *dharma* brings harm applies here. The Ramayana first went to the people as a poem. Religion thereafter took hold of it. To release it from this hold and treat it again as a poem is to do it service. When all is said and done religions in the wide expanse of history are houses of lac built for days. Now or a little later they are bound to burn and disappear. If the law of life stays in them it is sure to come to harm. It is in the power of poetry alone to save it from injury, and by claiming poetry as poetry we help to make righteousness permanent.

For the same reason we tend to gain by considering Rama as the hero of a poem and by not treating him as incarnation of God. In the Ramayana as we have it at present there are verses suggesting that when Valmiki wrote the poem he thought of his hero as Vishnu. Unable to bear the havoc that Ravana was causing, the Gods approached Vishnu for

protection and he agreed to take birth in the world and chose Dasaratha as his father. Rama was a half of Vishnu. Yet in the same text there are verses put into the mouth of Rama to the effect that he thought himself merely a man. When Mahadeva with the other Gods appears to Rama after his victory against Ravana and tells him he is of the Gods, Rama replies, I have believed myself to be human, being just Rama son of Dasaratha. There are people who examine the conduct of Rama in various situations and find that there are defects in it. They do not accept Rama as God, yet look for God's perfection in him. There are other people who accept him from the point of view of religion and think of him as God and justify all that he said and did and treat the joys and sorrows of his noble life as the stage play of a God who acted the part of a man. If we could think of Rama as no more than the hero of a poem, we should discover how high souled he was and if in his conduct a thing or two appeared dark, we should remember the hundred great things to his credit and not agree to make too much of a fault or two. We should discover too that rather than God who became man, Rama was man who by his conduct became God. This indeed would seem to have been the poet's object. Whether we think of Rama as God who became man or as man who became God, we shall be showing equal respect to his great life. But in the one case the object of our love will seem to us a stranger come into our midst and in the other case something which is our very own.



## II THE STORY OF THE ORIGIN OF THE RAMAYANA

### THE STORY OF THE CROUNCHA BIRDS

THAT the Ramayana started as a poem appears from an account of its birth given in the introductory chapters of the poem as we have it at present. We are told that the ascetic Valmiki asked the great and wise Narada to tell him who then in all the world was the most noble, heroic, virtuous, and disciplined of men. Narada who had access to all the three worlds told him the story of the Ramayana, of Rama's birth and early years, of his banishment on account of his step-mother, of his and his wife's sufferings in the last year of their exile, of his return and installation on the throne of his fathers and the years of beneficent rule by which he had become dear to his subjects. When Narada had left, Valmiki went out with his disciple Bharadwaja to the river Thamasa to bathe. The Thamasa, we are told, was a stream not far from the Ganges. At a spot where the water was lucid and clear Valmiki got down to bathe. Getting ready to take a dip, he looked around on the beauty of the wood close by. On a tree not far were two Crouncha birds calling beautifully in love sport. A huntsman came up just then and shot down the male. Seeing the companion lying in a welter of blood in the dust the female bird clamoured in grief. The heart of the ascetic was moved by the sad cries and he uttered

a curse on the huntsman. You have taken the life of one of the birds and shall attain no good for years and years. Immediately the sage felt that he ought not to have spoken a curse. At the same time he felt that the words he uttered were shapely and rhythmic and satisfied the laws of music and wished that these words of his uttered in sorrow might turn out auspicious and not remain a curse. Expressing this wish to his disciple Valmiki finished his bath and returned to his hermitage. When he sat down for meditation Brahma the maker of all the worlds came to him. Valmiki offered him due reverence and gave him a seat. Brahma asked the sage to be seated and told him that the words which he uttered in the fervour of his pity would turn out auspicious and asked him not to be unhappy. These sounds have proceeded in accordance with the laws I have ordained. Compose in the same manner the story of Rama which Narada told you. Record the occurrences of the lives of Rama and Lakshmana of the *Rajshasas* and of Videha with all the details open and hidden. What is not known to you will become known. No word of your poem will be other than truth. So long as the hills and the rivers endure so long will the story of the Ramayana be current in the worlds. Brahma then disappeared. Valmiki wondered at what had happened and proceeded to see in contemplation the story which he had to reduce to verse. All the laughter and the speech all the movements and the deeds of the story of Rama's life passed before his vision clear in every detail and he described all in a poem which came up to twenty four thousand verses. The composition

was beautiful and sweet to the ear, alike in reading and in singing. It obeyed the laws of poetry and song and was graceful with the qualities of great verse. Two young reciters of Valmiki's hermitage heard the poem and fell in love with it and begged the teacher to teach it to them, and when they had mastered the words, sang it before the sages. With eyes full of tears of joy and sympathy the wise men who heard them eulogised both the poem and the reciters. These two then went about the country repeating the composition to the populace and delighting all who heard, and passed one day into Ayodhya. Rama heard them singing in the street and sent for them and sat in audience with his brothers and listened to them. The assembly in the audience hall was charmed by the recitation. Rama himself was greatly pleased.

#### AUTHORSHIP OF THE STORY

This account of the origin of the Ramayana forms the first four *sargas* of the poem at present. The fifth *sarga* begins with the poet's statement that he would tell a story which arose in the great line of kings known as the race of Ikshvaku to whom, before any others, the world in entirety belonged. It is manifest that Valmiki began his poem from this *sarga*. The four introductory *sargas* are unlikely to have been the poet's work. An examination of their contents shows also that they should have been written by two persons. One of them wrote the first, third and fourth *sargas* which state that Narada told the story of Rama to Valmiki, that Valmiki sat down in meditation and

saw in vision all the details of that story as they occurred and that the two minstrels of Valmiki's hermitage learnt the poem by heart and recited it all over the country and in the presence of Rama. In these three *sargas* there is no suggestion of any unusual incident like Narada going to Heaven or Brahma coming down to the earth. The second *sarga* states that Narada returned to the Heavens that Valmiki uttered a curse when a huntsman killed the male of the Crouncha birds and that Brahma came and commanded Valmiki to compose the Ramayana in the manner that had come to him in uttering that curse. This *sarga* should have been written by someone else. It is likely that it was written by Valmiki's close disciple Bharadwaja or some descendant of his. The incident of the Crouncha birds was known personally only to Bharadwaja. While the other three *sargas* might be written by any admirer of Valmiki or his poem the second one could have been written only by a devoted personal adherent. On both these grounds it might be suggested that Bharadwaja himself wrote the second *sarga*. The mention however of the wonderful along with the likely makes it possible that some time had elapsed before this *sarga* was written and added to the introduction. If the inference is correct the person that wrote it would be some descendant of Bharadwaja who was Valmiki's disciple. That the community of the Bharadwaja was interested in connecting itself with the poetry of Valmiki and the Rama race of Kings appears also from certain other *sargas* in the Ramayana in which Rama and Bharata are stated to have visited the

hermitage of Bharadwaja. Some of these *sargas* give the impression of being interpolations. These four introductory *sargas* should however have been added to the Ramayana not long after it was composed by Valmiki.

### ITS IDEAS REGARDING POETRY

The narrative regarding the Crowning bird, implies certain notions of poetry which it is worthwhile to understand. It is not necessary for us to take all that is stated in the story as true. It is possible that Valmiki was a contemporary of Rama's, it is more probable that he was not. The verse that Valmiki uttered could not have been the first in that form in Sanskrit as the introduction seems to suggest. Immediately after it was uttered, Valmiki wished that it would be *shloka*. Both he and his disciple recognised certain qualities in it. If they were familiar with those qualities, they should have known the *shloka* before. It may not have been a very common form of composition but it could not have been unknown. Nor is it necessary to believe that, but for Narada's account, Valmiki would have been ignorant of Rama's story. Valmiki lived in the tract of country known as the Kosalas, by the side of the river Themasa which was not very far from the Ganges. According to the statements made in the introduction he was a contemporary of Rama's. If so, he should have known of the then reigning king of his land and the story of his life. He, however, should have desired to have the sanction of a person known for his wisdom, before holding that king up before the world as

a paragon of human virtue. When we have made these provisos we find that the Crouncha story contains suggestions which are contributions of permanent worth to the theory of poetry. The first of the suggestions is that poetry is the impassioned utterance of a heart which emotion has filled. In this case the emotion was a combination of pain, pity and anger and the expression of it became poetry. It is to be noted that the words were not thought out and shaped and strung together. They just came out. What in the heart was feeling turned to word on the tongue. Though there was no conscious composition the words showed an obedience to law which seems possible only if there is deliberation and construction. Brahma said that they proceeded in accordance with his will, his law of speech. Another suggestion of the story is that the man who wrote the poem was not consciously or intentionally or as we might say now, professionally, a poet. As the world knew him and possibly as he knew himself he was only a sage. Because of his temperament he became a poet. To say that Valmiki before he became a poet was only a sage is not to detract from his greatness. It is merely to say that the faculty of poetry is something added to a sage. As a later age said, no one produces poetry who is not a sage. Incidents of the kind witnessed by Valmiki could not have been rare in the forests. Many a saint should also have previously witnessed such occurrences. Poetry did not come into existence then. It came into existence when Valmiki saw one such incident. That one bird out of a couple should be killed seems

a trifling occurrence in the history of the world Yet to one like Valmiki who loved all life the pain in one heart though it was the heart of a bird, became the symbol of all the pain in the world What matters it what heart suffers? That which suffers is a life and in that there is neither large nor small nor superiority or inferiority Here poetry differs from philosophy which also looks with equal eye on large life and small life but practises equanimity in the face of suffering, accepting it as the portion of all life A further suggestion in the story comes from the statement that what was uttered as a curse was declared by Brahma to be the foundation verse of what was to be a great poem A poet experiences anger and utters an imprecation, but if that emotion proceed from righteousness what is sour will turn sweet, and vexation produce beauty for coming generations No poet utters words which express merely what he is aware of If in truth he is a poet the words will have power of the whole of which he cannot have cognizance He is merely the mouthpiece His speech comes from the primal source of all existence Not by speaking what he consciously thinks and wills does a poet attain his best effects but by acting as the instrument of a deeper self than his own This is true of all genuine poetry, even when it is not as great as Valmiki's Apart from all this is the fact that the scene of the birth of poetry was a beautiful wood by the side of a limpid stream Man's heart is touched by beauty in nature to fine issues and poetry is one of the things into which it flows when so touched So beautiful was the scene in this

case that an ascetic getting into the stream to bathe stood for a moment to look upon it. Valmiki was a sage but his make up included this willing submission of mind to the beautiful in nature. Valmiki has shown in his poem how capable he was of suffering with those whom he saw suffer and of enjoying what was gracious in the face of nature. He had besides a mind and imagination which had gathered strength by years of discipline and contemplation. That mind and imagination brought before him all the detail of the life of Rama and Sita and the hundred of person that appeared in it again as it occurred. Not even to those who passed through the experience could all the details have come so fully so unfailingly. We are told that Rama and no doubt Sita and Lakshmana heard the story as the minstrel recited it. If indeed they heard it we may well believe that they wondered that an ascetic from the forest should have known all the detail with such certainty. They should have remembered what they experienced when they heard his narrative. The imagination of poetry is invincible. No rank and no position and no secret of the heart are inaccessible to it. The poet says a proverb sees what the sun does not. The sun is indeed the world's eye yet there are things which he may not see but the poet sees so minutely that no detail is hidden from his vision. In Valmiki's poetry the laughter and the words the movement and the gestures of all the life which he described are presented with a fullness and correctness that compel admiration.



### III LATER ADDITIONS TO THE POEM

It has been stated that the first four *sargas* of the Ramayana as we have it at present were written by some one other than Valmiki and added to his poem. Current versions of the Ramayana have many portions so interpolated. Even the orthodox schools of thought in India admit that the poem contains interpolated work. But about what is interpolated there is as might be expected, difference of opinion. The most considerable of the parts interpolated is the seventh book called *Uttara Kanda* which describes the rule of Rama, and the exile of Sita on the ground of slander by the people of Ayodhya. The introduction to the poem suggests in one place that it concluded with the death of Ravana. Listen now to the story, it says of one thing and another and of the death of the ten-headed. If the introduction is to be believed, the whole story should have been written when Rama was king. Valmiki asked Narada who at the time of speaking was the worthiest of men, and Narada spoke of Rama and said that he would go to *Brahma loka* when he had finished his rule. It stands to reason that the poet who recorded the history of his king ended his work with the installation of that king. He certainly could not have written the history of a coming time. In certain versions of the introductory chapters there are words to the effect that the sage composed also the *Uttarakavya* including the rejection of Sita. It would appear that some of

these words do not occur in all the versions. It looks as if those who added the seventh book or someone who came afterwards added these words in the introduction. The seventh book makes mention of Vasudeva of the Yadava clan who should be Sri Krishna of the *Mahabharata*. Even if we admit that Valmiki anticipated some occurrences of coming years it would be absurd to suggest that he talked of Krishna who came in the *Dvapara* age. There are benedictory verses at the end of the sixth book of the *Ramayana*. There are no such verses at the end of the earlier books. It would follow that as first composed the *Ramayana* ended with this book. Whether or not orthodoxy accepts the view that the seventh book is interpolation in argument it shows by conduct that it could not have been part of the original poem. Persons of even the most orthodox class when they read the *Ramayana* for religious reasons conclude with the sixth book. It may be suggested that this is due to the seventh book being full of sorrow. The suggestion however may not be very sound for there is sorrow enough in the earlier books. It seems safer to hold that tradition treated the first six books as the sacred text and the seventh book as a thing apart and that this distinction is due to the seventh book being the work of another man. The narration in most of the book is also so inferior in quality that this by itself would be sufficient reason to question its authenticity. In the six books themselves there are portions which are clearly interpolation. The story of Rishyasringa being brought to officiate at Dasaratha's sacrifice for getting a son seems to be the earliest of them. The

interpolator has done his work rather clumsily with the consequence that certain verses coming before the Rishyasringa episode are repeated at the end, and the episode itself stands apart from the rest of the story like inlay work showing the joints. The horse-sacrifice being intended to give sons, there was also no need for the smaller sacrifice at which Rishyasringa officiated. There are verses in the early *sargas* to say that Rama was Vishnu and that the Gods headed by Brahma asked Vishnu to rescue the world from Ravana, and that Vishnu promised to be born as man. These verses show the crevices of inlaying. There are verses elsewhere intended to show that Vishnu is greater than Siva or Siva greater than Vishnu. These are also interpolations. When the story was told by Narada to Valmiki there was no belief that Rama was an incarnation of Vishnu, for Narada said that Rama would go to *Brahma loka*. The stories of Sagara and his sons making the ocean and the descent of the Ganges, of the fight between Vasishtha and Viswamitra, of Parasurama, Ahalya and Kakasura, and of Dasaratha killing the son of an ascetic, also seem to be interpolation. Scattered in all the *kandas* are chapters here and there which must have been later additions. Passages like that comparing the Buddha to a thief or those enunciating the sacredness of Gaya or of Rameswara also stand apart from their context. An example of a chapter or the greater part of a chapter interpolated is the one in which Rama asks his brother, Bharata, just come from Ayodhya whether he has been ruling the country properly. Rama has not been away from Ayodhya

sufficiently long for Bharata to have made many mistakes of the kind implied in the questions put to him. Some of the questions should have been present in the first narrative but the greater part should have been added later by a writer who wished to compile a chapter of royal ethics. The chapters describing the incidents soon after the abduction of Sita are characterised by repetition and lack of sequence which indicate that some of them were added. The writing gives the impression that some one felt that Valmiki's description was not sufficiently graphic and therefore made additions. Similarly an examination of the context makes it clear that the story of the burning of Lanka by Hanuman is interpolation. Hanuman had seen Sita had taken leave of her and started on the return journey. There was no reason why he should bring himself to the notice of Ravana. On the contrary there was every reason why he should return quickly and communicate news of Sita to his master. That in such circumstances he should have ruined a royal garden forced the *Rakshasas* to take note of him got himself bound and taken into the presence of Ravana and addressed to him words that were manifestly insolent and set him against his master and that master's consort whom he was going to leave alone in Lanka seems beyond all description foolish. Yet this is what he is supposed to have done. Quite clearly some one writing long after the events thought that it would be a pity for a mighty hero like Hanuman after having gone to Lanka to come away without some achievement to his credit and added the incident of the ruin of the king's garden and the

defiance of the king himself and the burning of Lanka. Similarly the chapter regarding the hymn to the sun in the *Yuddha Kanda* should be an interpolation. The previous *sarga* ends on the note of Ravana's return and his charioteer driving his car back to Lanka to save his master and of Ravana being angry and of the car returning to the battle. There is no suggestion there that Rama was tired or needed any special assistance. Yet the *sarga* in which the hymn to the sun occurs starts with a statement that, seeing Rama tired by the exertion of the night and anxious about the end, Agastya taught him that great hymn as ensuring success in battle. The first few verses in the next *sarga* seem to be part of the interpolation for they describe the car of Ravana in language and with elaboration unsuitable for the occasion. When these verses are left out—or even if they are kept—the story is resumed in this *sarga* at the point at which the previous *sarga* closes, stating that the charioteer drove the car or that, seeing the car of the enemy returning, Rama did so and so. The previous *sarga* and these words go together. There is no justification whatever for the *sarga* in the middle. Some one in later years who believed in the cult of sun worship should have added the *sarga* to exalt his faith. It would appear that in one of the commentaries of the Ramayana mentioning the number of *sargas*, this book is credited with one *sarga* less than it has at present. On the return journey to Ayodhya, Rama is supposed to have spent a day with Bharadwaja. Rama was coming in great haste to see his brother. There was no need for him to lose time

by remaining in Bharadwaja's hermitage. Just prior to this Sita saw Avodhya from her place in the *Pushpaka Vimana* and Rama told her to fold her hands to their ancient city. That immediately there after they should descend into Bharadwaja's hermitage seems inconsequential. As has already been suggested *sargas* of this kind should have been added by a Bharadwaja or a friend of the Bharadwajas in later years. The same may be said of the *sarga* in the *Ayodhya Kanda* in which Bharadwaja gave a dinner to Bharata's army. Parts of the *sargas* regarding Agastya in the *Aranya Kanda* should also be additions. Agastya is the guardian sage of the South of India. These passages may have been added when Lanka became identified with Ceylon and the Kannada and Tamil countries were made to furnish the places described as the scenes of Rama's adventures. The verses in metres longer than the *anustubh* appearing at the ends of *sargas* would all seem to be additions. They should have been put there by some one who divided the poem into *sargas* or if it was originally so divided revised the division. They generally repeat something stated in the earlier *anustubh* verses in other words and are rarely an improvement on them. They seem to have been put in to indicate the close of a *sarga* much as in Shakespearean drama a rhymed couplet came at the close of a speech in blank verse to indicate that it ended. Similar verses occur elsewhere and seem equally to be additions stating mostly something irrelevant or unnecessary. A few of them may have taken the place of lost verses of the original

poem, for without them the narrative does not hang together. This is the case with passages in the story regarding Vali and in the passage regarding the coronation of Rama. It would appear as if a writer of a later time put in these verses to make the narrative continuous and, to distinguish them from the composition of Valmiki, composed them in a different metre. If there is anything in this conjecture it may well be that the verses at the close of the *sargas* were composed in these metres with the same intention to mark them off from the original poem. It may well be that understanding of this kind existed for some time, and was then not communicated and dropped out of memory. Many writers who came after Valmiki thus added to his work a few verses here and a chapter there, chapters elsewhere and a whole book at the end. Those who accept the poem as it has come into their hands may be unwilling to give up any portion of it as not genuine. There is no need to quarrel with them. Nor is it necessary to make controversy to establish the view that all the parts that appear to be interpolation are the work of some one other than Valmiki. To satisfy a sense of truth and to do justice to Valmiki it is necessary to become aware that the poem, as we have it at present, contains writing that appears not to have been part of the original work of Valmiki. When that has been done we may proceed to the study of what undoubtedly is Valmiki's work. The Ramayana is great because of this portion which is indubitably the work of Valmiki, and it is here that the poem reaches the heights of its achievement.

#### IV THE STORY OF THE SIX BOOKS

VALMIKI'S poem as now available to us is in six books. As is made clear in the introductory *sargas* the object of the poem was to give the story of the life of Rama and his great and noble wife Sita. The first book gives an account of the Kosala country and of Ayodhya the capital and describes Dasaratha its wise and sagacious ruler. Dasaratha had no son and performed a sacrifice to please the Gods and get one. *Rama and three brothers were born sons to Kowsalya Sumitra and Kaikeyi*, the three queens of Dasaratha when Rama had grown up into youth Viswamitra the sage came and asked for his help in putting down some *Rakshasas* who were disturbing a sacrifice in his hermitage and Dasaratha reluctantly sent his son Rama with him and Lakshmana accompanied Rama when Rama had helped in the successful performance of the sacrifice in Viswamitra's hermitage the sage took him to Mithila the capital of Videha of which Janaka was the ruler. Janaka had a daughter Sita whom he had vowed to give in marriage to the mighty person who would string a certain bow which he had with him. Rama did this and in consequence Sita became his wife. Dasaratha was sent for and the marriage celebrated. *the three brothers of Rama married a sister and two cousins of Sita at the same time* the household of Dasaratha then returned to Ayodhya and Rama and Sita lived happily as husband and wife for several years.



In the second book we are told that when Bharata with Satiughna had gone to his uncle Aswapathi, brother of Kaikeyi, in his kingdom, Dasaratha in Ayodhya took the consent of the populace to his son Rama becoming the Yuvaraja and assuming the reigns of kingship, and made arrangements for the installation of Rama. Though Kaikeyi was willing, a servant-maid of hers poisoned her mind by suggesting that when Rama became the Yuvaraja, Kowsalya, the elder queen, would become all powerful and Kaikeyi and her son Bharata would be reduced to a helpless position, Kaikeyi thereupon determined to ask the King for two boons which had been due to her for a long time for services rendered when Dasaratha had been in danger, she asked him for these boons and he, not knowing what she would wish for, readily agreed, she then told him of her wish that Rama should go to the forest for fourteen years and that her son Bharata should be installed as Yuvaraja, there was great commotion in the royal household but in the end Kaikeyi's wishes had to be fulfilled, Rama was induced by Sita to take her with him and compelled by Lakshmana to take him also, and the three went to the forest accordingly, Dasaratha died, Bharata came from his uncle's house thereafter and, unwilling to be king in supersession of his elder brother, went to the forest and met Rama and begged him to return and assume kingship, Rama told him that they had to obey their father's command, Bharata returned with Rama's footwear to be a symbol of the kingship being his and not the

younger brothers and Rama proceeded further into the forest

The third book gives the story of Rama's wanderings in the forest and his meeting various sages and relates how in response to the wish of the population in these parts he went further south to keep the *Rakshasas* in check. Surpanakha, a sister of Ravana, saw Rama and Lakshmana one day and wished to consort with either of them as they might wish; they refused and when she offered to do violence to Sita, Lakshmana, at the bidding of Rama, cut her ears and nose. The *Rakshasas* in Dandaka came up and fought with Rama and were all vanquished by him. Surpanakha carried the news to Ravana and told him of Sita's beauty and of what an acquisition she would be as wife to him. Ravana plotted with Maricha to carry away Sita and for this purpose made Maricha appear in front of the cottage of Rama as a golden deer. Sita begged Rama to get her the deer for being taken to Ayodhya. Rama pursued the deer and was taken far and unwilling to go any further shot it with an arrow. Maricha, simulating Rama's voice, cried out. Sita, Lakshmana, and fell down. Sita sent Lakshmana, though he was unwilling to leave her alone, to help Rama. In the absence of both Rama and Lakshmana, Ravana came to the *Ashrama* and carried away Sita and took her to Lanka and tried by all sorts of persuasion and threat to induce her to give herself to him. She refused and Rama, missing Sita on his return to the cottage, yielded to grief and went about disconsolate in search of his stolen wife.



Vasishtha and Viswamitra and of Parasurama's fight with Rama which may be suspected to be interpolation are all found here. The part that concerns Rama himself is small. It has been suggested by some critics that Valmiki's poem should have been begun with the second book. Some part of the first book however should have been written by Valmiki the fifth chapter being clearly the beginning of his narrative. It is true however that the second book holds the largest measure of the human drama which Valmiki set out to show. Of interpolation there is not much in this book. Apart from the verse at the end of *sergas* in metre other than *anustup* and in a few of these cases the number of verses is fairly large there are perhaps in all some fifteen passages in this book which seem to be interpolation. One of them is of significance in the story as it suggests that Dasaratha suspected that Bharata might claim the throne in preference to Rama. One of the passages relates to the story of Dasaratha's youthful exploit of killing a young ascetic and earning a curse. Another attributes to Bharata some outrageously abusive words in addressing his mother. Another passage describes Bhradwaja's hospitality to Bharata's army and still another in bits expands the discussion between Jambhvi and Rama so as to imply a refutation of Buddha and Buddhism. The others do not affect either the narrative or the characterisation and altogether the book produces the impression of being an organic whole which is overwhelmingly the work of one poet and that poet the original narrator of the story. The third book contains description of

strange persons and events which could not have been written by any poet describing the incidents of his king's life in his own time or soon after as Valmiki is supposed to have done. Portions of it are undoubtedly later work, but there is in it in the description of the forest life of Rama and Sita and in the account of the abduction of Sita, poetry from the same hand as composed the *Ayodhya Kanda*. The tragedy of Vali and the story of the friendship of Rama and Sugriva and the restoration of Sugriva to the throne of his fathers seem also to be Valmiki's work. Some passages here picturing *Vanara* life seem to be addition of later times. The description of Hanuman meeting Sita in the fifth book and a great part of the picture of the life of Rama and Sita in separation is work from Valmiki's hand. Part of the picture, again, would appear to be not Valmiki's work. The human drama at the end of the sixth book on the same basis is the work of Valmiki. Some portion of the numerous chapters describing the fights of various heroes on the sides both of Rama and Ravana should be Valmiki's but some large part is unlikely to be such. Homer, to judge from the way he began the *Iliad*, might, if he had written the *Ramayana* have begun it with the *Ayodhya Kanda* leaving his audience to assume the details given in the earlier book. Valmiki gave the preliminaries of his story also but he reserved his full might for the book describing the tragedy of Dasaratha. Valmiki's poetry flows in a wide and full current in this book, and it is here that we see him at his highest power of narration.

## V THE HOUSEHOLD OF DASARATHA

### THE RIVALRY BETWEEN THE QUEENS

DASARATHA made a great mistake when he married Kaikeyi. She was beautiful but very vain. She came also of a line not known for much goodness. Her mother on one occasion wanted her husband to tell her why he laughed. He had laughed to hear two ants talk of something. He had the power to understand the speech of other creatures on condition that he would not reveal what he heard to others. Revelation would involve instant death. He would not tell his wife what it was he heard. She was persistent. He told her that if he revealed what he heard he would have to die immediately. The wife said, I do not care whether you live or die. I wish to know why you laughed. The king fortunately cared a little more for his life than for this heartless woman whom he had married. So he would not tell her why it was that he laughed. Kaikeyi had something of this mother in her nature. Like any old man who marries when he should not. Dasaratha was very uxorious. Kowsalya had come into his life in his youth. He had loved her and lived with her for years. He held her in respect for her nobility, gentleness and goodness. But love in regard to her was mere memory. Probably because he got no children from Kowsalya he had married Sumitra. Whether he ever cared sufficiently for Sumitra the story leaves in doubt. She

came to Dasaratha neither in the fervour of his youth nor the uxoriousness of old age. Hers was the misfortune of being treated with indifference. Dasaratha sometimes seems to have felt that she was a very good woman. But that he felt any warmer emotion for her does not appear. We understand from the story that besides these three queens Dasaratha had in his harem three hundred and fifty women. They seem to be referred to as women because they were not married in form but belonged to the court. It might have been Dasaratha's fondness for women or it might have been the custom in his time for a king to possess many ladies. What trouble came to him by the possession of so large a harem we do not know. Not much trouble came to him from Sumitra though she was a wife. Such trouble as came proceeded from the want of understanding between Kowsalya and Kaikeyi. Kowsalya seems to have felt that as the first married queen she should be treated with respect, that the third wife had stolen the King's love from her and that her own importance in the court was diminished by the presence of the young beauty. Kaikeyi on the other hand should have felt that she owned the King's love then as some one else had owned it in former years, that the mere coming earlier could not matter to the relationship and the position of the King's beloved and that Kowsalya had naturally to take the second place. That the queens treated each other with dislike is not shown in the poem. They referred to each other in terms of dislike. But the quarrel which the queens in their own proper person might not have carried on was

prosecuted on their behalf by their followers. This is what might be expected to happen anywhere where two persons of some importance each with some following are forced to live together. Kaikeyi's servant is shown to us asking a servant of Kowsalya when she was making gifts to the poor on account of the expected installation of Rama how it was that the close-fisted mother of Rama had become so generous. Kowsalya's servant does not protest against the insult implied in the question but merely answers what occasioned Kowsalya's joy. In this atmosphere of triumphant and unhappy wives and their followers the life of the King himself could not have been very happy. He loved the four sons whom these wives had borne him with the fondness of an aged parent. Of them all he loved Rama, Kowsalya's son, best. The sons grew into manhood and married. The king felt that they were well settled in life and spent some years in contentment and peace.

#### THE PROPOSAL TO MAKE RAMA YUVARAJA

Dasaratha himself had at no time any doubt as to who should be king after him. By the custom of the race of Ikshvaku his place would go to his eldest son. The people also should have known this. But the sons were all born at more or less the same time and the eldest was elder than the others by no longer than hours and days. The want of understanding between Kowsalya and Kaikeyi was also well known. However certain Rama's right to succession might have seemed to the King or to a few other persons, it was natural that Kaikeyi's servants should hope that the



son of their mistress would be preferred. The queens themselves might not have spoken about this matter but that it occurred to them appears from their words later. Some years had passed after the marriage of the princes when Bharata was invited by his uncle to spend some time with him. From their childhood Rama and Lakshmana, the elder of the two sons of Sumitra had been companions and similarly Bharata and Satrughna, Lakshmana's twin younger brother. When going to his uncle's house Bharata took Satrughna with him and Rama and Lakshmana were left with their father in Ayodhya. At this juncture the King thought of making Rama the Yuvaraja. There is no suggestion that he was influenced in his wish to do this by the fact that Bharata was absent. We may, however, infer that that fact had something to do with the King's desire. That he did not think of the arrangement in perfect good faith may be suspected from the fact that he did not announce his intention to the queens or to anyone in the royal household. He called a meeting of the representatives of the people and told them what he intended to do and asked for their opinion. They acclaimed the proposal with one voice. Dasaratha thereupon directed that arrangements be made for installing Rama as Yuvaraja and then sent for his son and told him of what he intended to do. Rama accepted the father's decision and, feeling that it should give his mother great joy, communicated the news to her. The poor old mother was overpowered with it. She blessed the son and said "Live long my son. Your rivals are vanquished. Invested with power, give joy to me and

nine and to Sumitra and to hers. Who the rivals were Kowsalya did not say. Nor did she say that Rama should give joy to Kaikeyi and her relatives Kaikeyi and her son and her following should have been the rival party she had in mind. The news that Rama would be installed as Yuvaraja caused much happy bustle in Kowsalya's Court. The queen began to make gifts to people. Kaikeyi's personal servant Manthara noticed the bustle and the free handed giving and asked Kowsalya's servants how their close fistled mistress was so free with gifts that day. Learning from that servant the cause of the elder queen's happiness Manthara ran up to her mistress and said

Rise O Queen your evil day has come. Your good fortune is driving up. When Kaikeyi asked her what had happened Manthara told her of the proposal to install Rama as Yuvaraja. Contrary to Manthara's expectations the news made Kaikeyi happy. She jumped out of her couch in delight looking like the crescent moon of a cloudless night in autumn and for having brought the great news she gave Manthara the necklace she had on. Manthara she said you have brought me most agreeable news. Between Rama and Bharata there is to my mind no difference. I am very happy that Rama will be installed on the throne.

Manthara threw down the guerdon that her mistress gave her and in great vexation remonstrated with her.

Are you mad? What is this joy of yours on such an occasion? You are in the midst of a sea of sorrow and do not know it. Looking at you so happy when great evil has befallen I feel as if I should laugh. What sense is this rejoicing in the prosperity of the

son of Kowsalya, your rival and enemy? How fortunate is Kowsalya! Her son is becoming Yuvaraja. You will stand near her and fold your hands to her as her servant." Kaikeyi in reply praised Rama. "Rama is righteous and he is grateful for affection shown. He is loyal and pure-minded. As the eldest son of the King he is the rightful heir to the throne. He will protect his brother as his son and as if he were his father. Why do you, silly dwarf, feel so sad at the thought of his installation? I hold Rama as dear as or dearer than Bharata and he will defer to me more than even to his mother Kowsalya." Manthara did not accept this statement. "You know nothing," she said. "You have not realised what misfortune is befalling you. If Rama should become King be sure that Bharata will have either to leave the country or leave this life. Rama's mother has been treated with great contempt in the past. Will she not wreak vengeance on you now?" Kaikeyi had no doubt of what Rama's attitude to her would be when he became king. But of the attitude of her rival Kowsalya she had fear. She remembered, as Manthara told her, that she had treated the elder queen with disrespect and could not overlook the possibility of that elder queen retaliating when her son became king. Fear of the ill-treated Kowsalya shook her love of Rama. Kowsalya would be in a position to hurt at all, only if Rama became King. Rama, she therefore determined, should not become King. She asked Manthara how this might be compassed. Long years ago in a war between the *Devas* and *Asuras* she had helped Dasaratha out of a danger. He had then given

her two boons to be asked at any time. Thus Manthara knew and she reminded Kaikeyi of it. Kaikeyi praised Manthara for her timely memory and decided to ask the King for the fulfilment of those two boons: the banishment of Rama as one boon and the enthronement of Bharata as the second boon. To give the King an idea that something had displeased her she entered the chambers of displeasure, pulled out the jewellery she wore and threw them on the ground and in attire which indicated misery lay on the bare floor.

#### DASARATHA'S NIGHT OF SORROW

Dasaratha knew nothing of all this. It was usual for him to come to the youngest queen to spend the evening. As usual he came to her that day and was told that she was in the chambers of displeasure. He was greatly disturbed by this information. Wondering what might have happened he came up to where the beloved queen was lying on the floor. The King really loved this wife and he asked her what it was that made her unhappy. Who has caused you annoyance or has misbehaved to you? Has anything been denied to you? Tell me what it is you desire and I shall carry it out. Kaikeyi said: Nothing has happened to me. No one has misbehaved to me. I have one desire and I want you to fulfil it. If you promise to do so I shall tell you what it is. Dasaratha said to her: You know my queen that there is no woman I love more than you and there is no man whom I love more than Rama. I swear by my Rama the invincible the foremost and may my great son live for long. I shall do whatever you desire. Do not

doubt this' Dasaratha did not know what he was promising. He gave strength to his promise by swearing it in the name of Rama. By the great love he bore to his eldest son he was swearing that he would send that son to the forest. 'This occurs in man's life on occasion. Like a child grasping a scorpion as a toy, man on such occasions hugs his evil as good. On Dasaratha swearing to carry out her wishes Kaikeyi told him what it was she wanted. Dasaratha was shocked on hearing Kaikeyi's wish and, sunk in sorrow, wondered whether it was real or just a dream or a clouding of his own mind or an experience of insanity. Like a deer which has seen a tiger he felt a pang and became unsettled. He came to himself after a long interval and remonstrated with his queen. "What has Rama done to you? He treats you as his mother. Why do you wish him harm? Did I bring you into my palace just to effect my ruin? The whole world is acclaiming Rama's goodness. For what offence in him shall I forsake him? I shall give up anything, not Rama. Rama is my eldest son and when I look at him my being surges up with love. My breath will not stay in the body if Rama leaves me. Give up this wish of yours, my queen. I shall touch your feet with my head. Do me this favour. Rama has been brought up in comfort. He is fixed in righteousness. How can he spend nine years and five years in the inhospitable wilds? It becomes you to feel some pity for an old man like me with a foot in the grave. I shall make you a gift of all the world right up to the sea. I fold my hands to you and touch your feet. Be good to Rama. Let not evil touch

him Kaikeyi said to him You have made your promise Why do you repent now and if you do what kind of righteousness is yours? From what I can see you wish to abandon righteousness and install Rama and live happily with Kowalya If this is the case I shall drink poison in your presence and take my life I swear this both by myself and my son Bharata Seeing how determined the queen was and realising the full significance of what would ensue the King sighed in despair and cried out Rama and fell prone on the ground like a tree that has been felled He ranted at length at Kaikeyi This evil which looks as if it were for your good from whom did you learn it? When I tell Rama that he has to go to the forest his face like the moon in eclipse will lose colour How shall I look on him in that condition? If Rama is exiled what will Kowsalya say to me and when I have done this mortal unkindness what is it I can say to her? Kowsalya served me as if she were a servant She has been a friend and wife and helpful as sister or mother She has always wished me well I ought in return for all this do her much kindness I fail to do it because of you If Rama goes into exile I shall not live Widowed you will rule the country with your son If I ask Rama to go to the forest he will not refuse Indeed he will agree without hesitation Send him to exile and when I am dead and Kowalya is dead and Sumitra is dead place us in hell and be happy yourself Alas Rama has lived in the comforts of a palace all these years How will he endure the hardships of forest life? Well Queen do what you will I am not going to carry

out your wishes Oh, Queen, do not do me harm I shall touch your feet, be gracious to me' So the King went on speaking, now praying, now threatening now sorrowing, now supplicating Valmiki's deep acquaintance with man's nature appears in full in the description of this situation Kaikeyi said to the King "You are honest and firm of purpose and yet you are talking in this manner", and would have gone on but before she could proceed any further, the King flared up and poured words on her "How ever shall I drive to exile Rama, so handsome, so powerful, so strong and lovable? I shall surely ensure for myself peerless ignominy and eternal disgrace' The old King felt deep pity for Rama that he should be going to face the difficulties of exile, but he knew that the son would be able to endure all that hardship More than for Rama it was for himself that the King grieved By exiling the son he would ruin his name for ever and men would for ever refer to him as the man who drove out a righteous son for the sake of a younger wife In this exchange of words between Dasaratha and his queen the evening wore on and night came and the moon reigned in the sky That night was beautiful as many another which the King had spent in the very same place with the very same queen but it brought him no happiness In the same place he now suffered sorrow great as the joy which had come to him there formerly He might then have wished that day-break might never come The joy must have seemed so welcome On this night of sorrow also, he wished that the day might not break "O, night, adorned with stars be merciful to me

I fold my hands to you do not end let not dry come  
 I or when the dry dawned Rama would have to leave  
 Ayodhya in exile The only way to prevent this was  
 for time to stop This the King wished but the next  
 moment he felt that he had been in the company of  
 the evil woman he called his wife long enough So  
 he prayed to night to move quickly Finally hoping  
 that possibly Kaikeyi might relent if begged again he  
 said to her I have treated you well and have grown  
 old and am in humility to be gracious to me my  
 Queen I am besides King It was not in loneliness  
 where no one was present that I spoke of installing  
 Rama as Yuvaraja Men heard what I willed Let  
 my proposal be fulfilled my pretty one my kindly  
 goddess Let Rama get the kingdom from you and  
 get you for your elf a good name my beautiful and  
 shapely one Do that which will give pleasure not  
 merely to me and Rama to the elders and to the  
 country but even to Bharata All this supplication  
 was powerless to move Kaikeyi

### THE KING'S COLLAPSE

The night went and a new day came but the  
 King's problem still remained Kaikeyi said to him  
 You made a promise and have not yet fulfilled it  
 What is this lying on the ground? Those who know  
 right and wrong say that the essence of right is truth  
 In the name of truth and righteousness I am a king  
 you Shibi gave up his life and Aksha pulled out  
 his eyes for truth in the past It is because of truth  
 the ocean does not transgress its bounds Truth is  
 the abode of God In truth righteousness is rooted



'Truth is sacred knowledge in entirety. Truth brings the bliss of the hereafter. Hold on to truth and carry out my wish. If you refuse and abandon me I shall abandon life in your presence.' This dissertation on truth by a woman who was merely bent upon selfish ends sounds curious but such words are fairly common in life. The thief tells the owner that he ought to declare where the money is and that it would be dishonest not to do so. The King heard the exposition of his duty by the Queen and was bewildered. He did not know how he should get out of his desperate position and said to her 'I now renounce you. I renounce your son also. Now that night is over, Rama with the things which had been gathered for his installation will perform my obsequies. You and your son shall have no share in them.' "What useless talk is this?" said Kaikeyi. "Direct that my son should become king and send Rama to the forest. Rid me of my enemies and justify your life." The King felt beaten and like a hare caught up by the pursuer gave up the struggle. "I am bound by my words as by bonds. I am dying. I wish to see my righteous Rama, my eldest and dearest son."

#### RAMA'S ACCEPTANCE OF BANISHMENT

Vasishtha, priest and counsellor to the King came with the things required for the ceremony of installation and asked Sumantia, chamberlain and charioteer, to inform the King. Sumantia came to where the King was and addressing him with the usual fine words of the morning greeting told him that the ceremonies had begun and that Vasishtha was ready with the others.

The King turned on him eyes red with sorrow and said You are hurting me further with your words The Chamberlain was taken aback by the sad words and the piteous plight of his master The King himself could say nothing more Kaikeyi took it on her self therefore to speak to Sumantra Sumantra she said the King is overpowered by the thought of Rama's happiness and having been awake the whole night is feeling drowsy Go you with speed and bring the young Prince Sumantra made haste and conveyed Kaikeyi's instructions to Rama The Prince told Sita that he was going to the King and left his palace Sita walked with him to the door wished him prosperity and sent him on The streets were full of people happy in the expectation of their Prince being installed as the Yuvaraja Rama walked through the crowds and came to the step mother's palace and saw his father in the grip of overpowering grief and sighing and did obeisance to the father and step mother The King uttered his name and could say no more He could not even raise his eyes to see his son The Prince felt greatly afraid and wondered what had happened and said to his step mother My father does not speak to me Have I unwittingly given him any offence? Or is he unwell? Or has other evil happened? Or did you mother say anything harsh to him? Why is my father so agitated? Pray tell me Kaikeyi unashamed told him The King is not angry nor is he unhappy He has one desire but he is not expressing it for fear of you He loves you dearly and cannot say what will be unpleasant to you Your father made a promise to me and is

trying to escape from it. "If you undertake to carry out that promise, I shall tell you what it is," Rama said. "Lady, do not, I pray you, say such words to me. Only tell me what it is that the King wants and I shall most certainly carry it out. I vow this. Rama never broke his vow." Kaikeyi told the Prince all that happened and said, "Joy of the Raghu race, carry out the promise made by the King. By a great act of righteousness establish your father's name." Rama heard the bitter words, and grievous and unwelcome like death though they were, he was not upset by them. He replied calmly to the step-mother, "I shall do my father's wish. I shall carry out the promise he has made and shall wear clothing proper to the forest and go to exile. I do not mind this, but I mind something else. My father used to speak to me, smiling and happy. He is not doing so now." Kaikeyi told him, "Be quick then and start. Your father is unable to talk to you because of shame. He is not displeased with you, but until you leave, he will not bathe or take his food." The King heard the interpretation put upon his silence by the queen and exclaimed "fie fie" and gave a long sigh and fell into a swoon. Rama raised his father up, put him on his seat and said to his step-mother, "Lady, I am not a person to live in love of wealth. Believe me, I am like a *Rishi* who stands rather by righteousness. I shall do your pleasure, even sacrificing life if necessary. Righteousness knows nothing greater than serving one's father and carrying out his promise. I shall stay in Ayodhya just long enough to take my mother's permission and tell my wife. Immediately

I have done this I shall leave Let Bharata become king and serve our father here This lady is your duty also This indeed is the ancient law of righteousness He then touched the feet of his unconscious father did obeisance to his step-mother and left the palace

### KOWSALYA'S GRIEF

Lakshmana had come in somewhat earlier and seen and heard what had passed He was wroth and unhappy and went out with Rama Rama proceeded to the vessel which had been consecrated for the ceremony of installation and went round it in reverence before going further There was no agitation in his mind at his installation having been prevented He told the men of the royal paraphernalia that they need not accompany him and went alone to his mother's palace Kowsalya was making gifts and observing a vow in prayer for her son's prosperity When he saw Rama coming she came up to him in elation

May the years and the honours and the righteousness of the noble and righteous kings of ancient time be yours she said and added Your father is firm in righteousness in that he installs you as heir apparent to day She asked the son to sit down and take something to eat Valmiki's knowledge of human life appears in perfection in the narration of small incidents of this sort in such a context Kingship may be at stake and the happiness of a whole country yet in narrating the story of such a situation the poet makes specific mention of the Queen asking her son to eat something To the mother it is at all moments a

great matter that her son should eat and Valmiki was unable to omit the fact in speaking of life. When his mother placed him on a seat and asked him to eat something and said that his father was firm in righteousness and would install him as heir-apparent, Rama folded his hands and bowed to his mother and told her what had happened. The situation is among the most dramatic in Valmiki. Two souls face each other here. One is essentially motherly. The manner of Kowsalya approaching Rama the poet describes as that of the mother mare coming to the colt. The young one is grown up but in the mother's eyes it is eternally young. The young one itself is self-conscious and is somewhat shy and hesitant. Kowsalya was still in the belief that her son would be installed. Rama was free from that illusion. Her life had touched the top of happiness and was standing there. His was in sorrow that that happiness was not to be, this not on his own account but hers. The poet here gives a picture of expectancy facing disillusionment, elation facing grief and moonlight face to face with darkness. Rama broke his mother's illusion. Kowsalya fell on the ground like a tree cut by the axe. Rama took her up and flicked the dust from her clothes. Kowsalya said "My son, if you had not been born I should have escaped this grief. Those who have no children have only the sorrow that they have none. They know not other sorrow. It did not fall to my lot to see much wealth and pleasure in life with my husband. I was the eldest queen, yet heard many words of contempt from other women and suffered. This has happened when you were here. What may

not happen when you have gone to the forest. Surely it will mean death to me. Who will care for me hereafter? Who will think of me? From now on I am the equal of Kaikeyi's follower or less than they. My son how shall I spend the days if I may not see you? I fasted much and observed vows and endured hardship of many a kind to make you a man. All that is now waste. I wonder that I hear this news and yet my heart does not break. It should be very strong indeed. To the Queen who was thus passing from mood to mood of an unbearable grief Lakshman said. Mother I too disapprove as absurd the suggestion that because a woman desires it Rama should renounce kingship and go to the wilderness. The absurd and old king is infatuated with the younger queen. What is it he will not say on her account? I know no fault in Rama and no offence that justifies his being driven from the kingdom and sent to live in the wilds. I know no one who is his enemy or whom he has injured or who has any grievance against him. Rama is good as the Gods walking in the ways of righteousness. He is self controlled and shows kindness even to his enemies. Who will thus without cause abandon a son who is so good? He then addressed his brother and said. Brother if you and I should stand together who in the world can face us? If anyone should I shall take his life. If my father persuaded by his younger queen should oppose us I shall slay him or make him prisoner. He who does not know what may be done and what may not be done deserves punishment however elder. And again he said to Kowsalya. Mother I love

Rama greatly and I swear by truth and by my bow and in the name of charity and the holy sacrifice, the moment that Rama enters either the forest or the blazing fire I enter it too. Watch me, mother, removing by my valour this cause of your grief. Watch and see. Rama also will see." Lakshmana's loudness and violence led Kowsalya to hope that after all her son might stay and become king. Lakshmana and Rama might stand together and a party gather round them and frustrate the plot of her enemy. Kowsalya did not realise that the reason for Rama's deciding to go to the forest was not his inability to stay in Ayodhya or the fear of an opponent. If a man is aware of his right to stay and has the power to enforce that right why would he go? So she and others like her argued. This was natural. What really was driving Rama to the forest was neither Kaikeyi nor Dasaratha, it was his sense of right. The father had made a promise. Whether it was right or wrong was not the question at the moment. That the father's promise should not be left unfulfilled was the great matter. This result could be ensured only by Rama's resolution. So he resolved to go, treading the path of righteousness which is dangerous like the edge of a sword and narrow even as that edge. Others saw the danger but did not see that that was the only way. "Son," said Kowsalya, "You hear what your brother says, do now what is required. It is not right for you to carry out my rival's wish and go away, leaving me here helpless. You speak of righteousness. Righteousness requires that you should stay here and serve me. This is the

most important of the things that righteousness requires of you. The King is entitled to reverence from you. But so am I. If you go away I shall die and the sin will be yours. Rama said to her. It is not in my power to transgress my father's promise. Pray mother give me permission. That which I am observing as right is not a new law. I do what the elders did in the past. To fulfil the promise made by a father is not a new path in goodness. Doing this right thing cannot cause harm but only good. He then said to Lakshmana. Brother Lakshmana I know well how greatly you love me. I know also that your valour, rectitude and self respect are remarkable. I know equally well that our mother's grief is deep without comparison. But my brother greater than all this is righteousness. The essence of righteousness is truth. That our father's promise should be carried out: for this reason the substance of righteousness for you and me. You should therefore give up this attitude of resistance and adopt the right course. He further said to the mother. Give me permission my mother. I beg you in my own name give me your blessings and let me go. I shall fulfil my father's promise and return to our city. You as well as I and Lakshmana and Sumitra also should go in the path marked by my father. This is the ancient law. Then he tried to calm Lakshmana and observed that man should submit to the decree of fortune. Lakshmana could not agree to this will of fortune. The man who has no strength and is weak of heart he has to submit to fortune. Men of self respect will not wait upon fortune. By their enterprise they compel



fortune When fortune brings them harm they do not suffer it I can prove to you this very moment that none of these things that you are thinking of need occur in consequence of fortune These arms of mine are not given to me for mere beauty Nor do I hold this bow as a mere ornament Tell me how the kingship can come to you and in obtaining it for you I am your servant" To all this Rama gave no reply Kowsalya saw that her son was unshaken in the resolve to carry out his father's wish and began to wail "My son who, till to-day, knew no hardship, how will he live by beggary? He whose servants and slaves eat sumptuous food, how will he live on fruit and root in the wilderness? Fate, truly, has great power It gets these impossible things to be done Oh son, I shall follow you where you go" Again Rama had to remonstrate with her "The King has been deceived by the younger queen If you also abandon him he will surely die To give up the husband is not right in a woman So long as my father is alive your duty is to serve him This, mother is the ancient law" Now Kowsalya agreed with him and Rama said to her "I shall spend the fourteen years in the forest as if I were strolling in a garden and shall come back well and happy to serve you" The poor mother now gave him her blessings "It appears that you must go to the forest If you must, you must but may you come back soon Let that same righteousness which you are following so firmly and strictly protect you May that to which you have bowed in places of worship and prayer look after you with the sages in the wilds May the spirits of the earth and air

protect you the days and months the seasons and the years days and nights and the hours and moments Let them all work good to you The mighty firmament and the mid regions all the rivers stars and planets and Gods all of them may they all at all times guard you Let no harm come to you from the *Rakshasas* and *Pisachas* cruel and flesh eating workers of evil And may you have the blessings with which the mother of Indra blessed him as he started to vanquish Vrihtra May you have also the blessings uttered by Vinatha to her son Garuda when he started on his journey to bring ambrosia The blessings which Adithi gave to Indra the slayer of the demons at the hour of the birth of the immortal elixir be yours May you have the good that came to Vishnu of unbounded power in the hour of his encompassing the three worlds Having blessed her son in these words Kowsalya took him in her arms caressed him on his head and said Son go now and come back after fulfilling your determination Rama went round her in reverence and bowed to her and proceeded to his palace to get the consent of Sita to his journey

#### SITA'S RESOLVE

Sita noticed that Rama was not accompanied by the paraphernalia of his position and feared a little and asked him why he had come in that manner Rama said I shall be in exile for fourteen years *Bharata will be Kuruya* during the period I wanted to tell you before leaving and came here You should never speak in praise of me in the presence of Bharata Men in prosperity do not bear

praise of others Do not claim undue attention in the palace, conduct yourself so as not to seem an opponent When I have left for the forest you should engage yourself in vows and fasts Worship God at prescribed hours and in the prescribed form and treat my father Dasaratha and my old grief-stricken mother Kowsalya with respect Our step-mothers are worthy of worship even as my mother Bhaata and Satrughna are dearer to me than life You should look on them as brothers and sons You should at no time do what is unpleasant to Bharata He is king and lord of both the country and the lineage Permit me to go to the forest" Sita heard these words of Rama in great temper and said to him "Rama, what is this you are saying? What you are uttering in this matter-of-fact way as your resolution makes me laugh as I hear it Father, mother, brothers, sons and daughters-in-law enjoy, each of them, his or her own fortune The wife is the one person who has no separate share of merit and fortune The wife shares her husband's fortune Those who bade you go to the forest have therein bade me go there too If you go to the forest, I go there in front of you I remove the stones and thorns from your way I shall not be the cause of trouble to you Do not hesitate to take me I shall be happy in the wilds as in my father's house I shall serve you constantly, shall observe vows and celibacy, and shall enjoy the sweet-scented forests in your company You have the ability to look after me there and I shall not give you any trouble I greatly desire to go with you, who know so much, and see the streams and ponds Oh,

how I wish to see the lakes with swans and water birds floating on the waters and bright with the spread of lotus flowers<sup>1</sup> I shall live with you in strict discipline and bathe in the waters of those lakes I could lead this life with you a hundred thousand years and feel no hardship in it Heaven would not be more agreeable to me than this And if I should live in heaven without you I should not relish it Rama tried to remonstrate with her Lady you come from a noble lineage You are ever intent on virtue Stay you here and fulfil your duties The wilderness is full of hardship Listen to me The noises of the forests are frightening The animals of the wilds strike terror as you look on them The streams are muddy and the waters are full of crocodiles The paths are strewn with thorns and the creepers obstruct One has to eat such fruit as drops from the tree not getting it one has to fast One grows his hair into matted locks and wears crude cloth Snakes of many shapes and many kinds creep about there Creatures of earth and air stinging and biting cause continual discomfort Do not talk of coming to the forest To this Sita said The very things which you enumerate as the discomforts of forest life seem to me because of you its attractions The lions and tigers cannot do us harm As they have not seen people they will move away when they see you And when I am with you is it possible for the king of the Gods to molest me? When I lived in my father's house I had heard from Brahmins that I was destined to spend part of my life in the forest I have ever since longed to live there The prophecy of those Brahmins has now come

true So too said a sibyl in those days Rama, what are the reasons for your not wishing to take me with you? Am I not devoted to you? Am I not dear to you? Have I not a share in your joy and sorrow? It is not proper for you to leave me here broken-hearted and go by yourself Should you do so, I shall give up my life" Rama repeated his remonstrance again and again Sita stoutly refused to listen to any of it As he persisted in objecting, she said to him "Rama, did my father, having got a woman in man's form, take you to be his son-in-law? People say that there is no person of greater valour than Rama This should be untrue What are you guilty of that you are thus cast down? What is it that is causing you fear and for what reasons do you wish to abandon me? Why do you leave me with others like a person living on his wife's virtue? I cannot imagine that there may be a single other person like you If I am with you, the stone and the thorn of the way will seem soft like cotton and leather to my feet The dust raised by the wind, I shall consider as the scented powder of heaven What can be more pleasing than lying on a mat of rough grass on the green sward of the woods? Fruit or root bark or leaf, whatever you bring, whether in large quantities or small, that will be to me welcome as ambrosia I shall not be a source of trouble to you I shall not become a burden to you Do not leave me here Take me with you If you insist on going alone I shall take poison and die I shall be unable to bear the pain of separation from you for even a moment What talk then of ten years and three and a further year?" Sita

raised her voice and wept and held Rama in her arms. Rama then said to her: "I do not desire the heavens leaving you in sorrow. There is nothing anywhere of which I am afraid. I am able to look after you in the forest, but beloved, I could not ask you to come there. I had to know your mind. From what you say it appears as if you were born to spend the years with me in the wilderness. As a valorous man cannot escape fate, so are you to me uneatable. Certainly accompany me. Be my companion. This resolve of yours becomes the noble lineage which owns you and me. Prepare to start. Make gifts to Brahmans and beggars and servants. Sita felt greatly delighted by this reply and began to distribute her ornaments and other things."

#### LAKSHMANA'S INSISTENCE

Lakshmana had come in when this discussion was going on. As soon as it was over he fell on his brother's feet and told him and his sister-in-law:

"If you two should go to the forest which is infested with wild beasts and elephant, let me also go with you. I shall go in front of you with my bow. Brother, I do not desire to possess the realm of the Gods or their immortality without you nor the lordship of the worlds. When Rama told him he ought to stay in Ayodhya, Lakshmana said: 'Did you not agree to this long ago? Why do you object now? What is the idea in refusing me permission? Pray tell me. I fear you doubt me.' Rama said: 'Brother, I know that you love me greatly, that you are pure and righteous. You are with me in everything and are to me dear.

as life, not merely a brother but friend too are you. But, Lakshmana, if you and I both go to the wilds who will look after my mother and your mother? Our father is in the grip of an infatuation. Our step-mother will not treat her rivals well. Bharata, having become king, will be unable to attend to them. You should stay and look after my and your mothers. This is how you will best demonstrate your devotion to me. The service you should render to me as elder brother in this way." "Brother," said Lakshmana, "Bharata, remembering your valour, will serve Kowsalya and Sumitra, omitting nothing. Kowsalya herself can look after a thousand like me. So indeed can my mother Sumitra. Let me go with you. This is not contrary to *dharma*. Doing this I shall have got what I wish. You too will gain something. I shall go in front of you, with my bow drawn and ready and my shield and the sheath of arrows, and make the way for you. I shall every day bring you fruit and root for food. While you and Videhi spend your time pleasantly in the valleys, I shall attend to all your needs, awake and asleep." Lakshmana's insistence pleased Rama greatly and he said, "Very well, brother, go and tell your friends of this. Bring also your own and my arms." So it was settled that the three of them should go to the forest.

#### THE DEPARTURE OF RAMA, SITA AND LAKSHMANA

When they had distributed their personal property to friends and dependants, Rama, Sita and Lakshmana came to the King. Dasaratha said to Sumantia, "Ask all my queens to come, I wish them

to be with me to see my righteous son. They all came with Kowsalya. Dasaratha asked Sumatra to bring Rama near him. As Rama approached him Dasaratha saw him from a distance and fell from his seat. His wives stood around him weeping. Rama and Lakshmana ran up to their father together and lifted him up. The King regained consciousness in a little while. Rama folded his hands to him and said, 'I have come to take permission before leaving for the forest. Lakshmana and Sita say that they will accompany me. They also ask your leave. We desire that you should not be too grieved.' The King told him, 'Son, I have been foolish and given a promise to Kaikeyi. Put me down and become king.' Rama said to his father,

All the years that you live you are the lord of this earth. There is no good that I wish to achieve making your word untrue. I am willing to be in exile. I shall spend fourteen years in the forest as in a pleasant stroll. I shall fulfil my vow and shall come again and touch your feet. Son said Dasaratha, 'good befall you. Prosperity befall you. Safe return be yours. Go and return. May all good come to you in your journey and no harm. You are firm in truth and determined on rectitude. It is not possible for me to change you from your resolve. But stay here this night and then leave. Let me have the joy of seeing you this one day more. Stay this one day seeing me and your mother and leave in the morning to-morrow.' Rama heard these words of his heart-broken father and said, 'How shall I say that to-morrow my heart will be set in the same way? Now



is the moment for me to leave. Do not grieve, my father, I beg you." The King was broken with grief, took his son in his arms, became unconscious and stood still. The queens were all crying. The people who had gathered round cried out. Sumantia, the charioteer, spoke wild words to Kaikeyi. He reminded her of her mother and told her she was a worthy daughter of such a mother. Kaikeyi said nothing in reply to all this. Dasaratha said to Sumantra, "Let my army with a store of wealth accompany Rama. Let Rama go with a following proper to his rank: chariots, horses, other mounts and weapons let them be taken. As he strolls in the woods and enjoys the pleasures of life, Rama will not even think of Ayodhya. Let Bharata rule Ayodhya and Rama journey in state." Kaikeyi got frightened at these words of the King and said, "King, you ought not to give Bharata a kingdom empty of people and wealth, like a drink deprived of its essence." The King shouted at her, "You have laden me with a load that I am unable to carry. Why do you prod me? You did not say this earlier." To these words of anger Kaikeyi replied with even greater anger, "Sagara of your lineage sent his son Asamanjasa to the forest. As he went then, so let Rama go now." All the assembly felt disgusted at this. Dasaratha cried, "fie, fie" and the people were ashamed. Kaikeyi was not aware of their feeling. Siddhartha, one of the great ministers of state, said to her, "Lady, Sagara drove his son into exile because that son took the children of the citizens to the river and drowned them. No such crime in Rama do we know."

Have you seen any? If you have pray state it That will justify us in driving Rama to exile In this whirlpool of remonstrance and recrimination business was delayed Rama had to intervene to get things moving He who had the greatest reason for sorrow was exercising the greatest self control and helping others through the crisis Addressing his father very respectfully Rama said to him Father I am going to the wilderness What shall I do with paraphernalia there? Having given away an elephant shall a man wrangle about the rope? I have my bow and arrows and arrow sheath Give us the clothes of exile we shall wear them and go Kaikeyi herself brought the crude clothes and in the presence of the whole assemblage gave them to him saying Wear Rama put on one of them and Lakshmana another Sita took one and not knowing how it should be worn addressed her husband and asked How do the women of the hermitages wear this cloth? and felt a little shame at not knowing how to put it on At this Rama hastened to her and himself tied the crude cloth over the silks that she had on The ladies of the court wept profusely at the sight and said to Rama

Sita is not a person decreed to exile In your absence we shall have her at least with us Leave her here and take only Lakshmana Rama had by this time finished tying the crude cloth on his wife To see the princess in that cloth upset even Vasishtha He scolded Kaikeyi and said Sita is not bound to go to the forest If she has to follow Rama in this way we all shall go with him The whole city is sure to follow him Even Bharata along with Satrugna will

follow Rama and wear the cloth he wears and stay where he stays You will then be ruling over this land, destitute of living beings, full only of trees all by yourself The land which Rama has left will not be the kingdom The wilderness in which he lives will become the kingdom Sure as Bhaiata is Dasaratha's son he will refuse to reign over this kingdom not given by his father Do what you will, he will never break the custom of his lineage which he knows full well You will see presently that even the cattle of the land and all the birds and beasts and trees will accompany Rama as he leaves" It was perhaps decided that, as exile had been asked for only on behalf of Rama, it was not necessary for Sita to wear the crude cloth At the moment of leaving Rama said to his father "My mother Kowsalya is advanced in years She knows her duty to you and does not blame you My departure will cause her immense grief I would pray you to see that she bears that grief and lives" The King almost swooned at these words, called out "Rama," and was unable to utter another word Recovering himself presently he said to Sumantra "Bring the chariot and take them to the boundary of the kingdom Give Sita all the jewellery and things that she will require" Kowsalya held her daughter-in-law to her breast and said "Though my son is deprived of kingship cease not to treat him with consideration Prosperous or destitute he to you is God" Sita said in reply "I shall do exactly as you wish I myself know how a woman should conduct herself to her husband I have also heard Do not, I beg you, take me to be not true" Rama took leave

of his mother These years of exile will fly fast By the time you have lain down and risen the fourteen years will have passed I shall return You will see me He then turned to his other mothers and said

If I have ever unknowingly said anything harsh or done anything unkind I beg you all to forgive me and give me leave They cried in silence Rama Sita and Lakshmana went round the King in reverence bowed to Kowsalya and started Lakshmana bowed once again before leaving to his mother Sumitra She caressed him and said You are so attached to Rama it is clear that you are destined for life in the forest Do nothing that will be unloyal to Rama in his exile whether he be in sorrow or in joy He alone is your refuge It is the way of the good to walk in submission to an elder It is conduct in accord with the custom of your lineage Go and return my son Hold Rama as Dasaratha treat Sita as you would me and feel in the forest as in Ayodhya May you be happy Go and return Rama Lakshmana and Sita sat in the chariot and Sumantra started The whole town ran behind the chariot The King came out from the palace to have a last look at Rama and all his wives accompanied him Rama asked Sumantra to make haste But the people wished him to delay The charioteer did not know what to do Rama seemed as if he did not see his father and mothers standing outside Kowsalya ran behind the car as a cow behind its calf calling out Rama Rama and Sita Lakshmana The King wished to go behind the car but the ministers told him that it was not auspicious to go

too long a distance with people whose return one desired and stopped him, and the chariot proceeded

### AYODHYA IN GLOOM

A gloom came over Ayodhya from the moment that Rama left it. Not only did the people grieve, the elephant would not take its food, the cow did not allow the calf to suck. The King stood where he was as long as the dust raised by Rama's car was visible. He looked at the dust with eagerness as if he was looking at Rama. When he could see it no more, he dropped on the ground overpowered by sorrow. The last time when he fell Rama and Lakshmana had run up to him and lifted him up. Now Kowsalya came up to him on the right and Kaikeyi on the left. The King shook off Kaikeyi. "Wicked woman, do not touch me. I have no wish to see you. You are no wife to me. The bond between us is severed. Your people are not my people and I am not of yours. You yielded to avarice and abandoned goodness. I abandon you. I now renounce, both in regard to this world and the next, the relationship which I established with you when I held your hand and walked with you round the sacred fire. If Bharata take this Kingdom and is glad, may the last offerings he will make in my obseques not reach me!" He then looked again in the direction of Rama's departure and said "I see the steps of the horses which carried away my son. Him I do not see. Eldest of my sons he used to rest in a soft bed smeared with fragrant sandalwood. Beautiful maids fanned him to sleep. Now he seeks the shade of a tree and his pillow is a log

of wood or a piece of stone. As my son gets up from sleep and walks about wild tribes will look on his long armed figure and take him the lord of the worlds to be one destitute. Janaka's dear daughter who grew in comfort is now in the wilderness. Unacquainted with life in forest she will surely feel great fear there. Kaikeyi let your desire be fulfilled. Become widow and rule this land. I cannot live without Rama. So speaking Dasaratha reentered the palace. As the palace was empty of Rama, Sita and Lakshmana, he asked to be taken to Kowsalya's apartment. I shall have no peace elsewhere, he said. The servants took him to Kowsalya's abode. Even that place was empty to him thinking of Rama, Sita and Lakshmana. He cried out. Rama, you have given me up and gone. Happy are they who will live till you return and will embrace you. Night fell and the darkness grew deep as Dasaratha's sorrow. The King said. Kowsalya, my sight which followed Rama has not returned to me. I cannot see you. Kowsalya. Put out your hand and touch me. Kowsalya sat near the unhappy King and began to express her own grief.

It is at points like this again that Valmiki's infallible insight into human nature surprisingly reveals itself. The poor King expected to be comforted by his queen in the sorrow of separation from their son. He should have felt as by instinct that by electing to go to her house rather than his own or anywhere else after saying the harsh words he had uttered to Kaikeyi, he had established good relations with the elder queen. He should also have expected that his conduct would be so understood by

Kowsalya He should have thought that she would revile Kaikeyi and sympathise with his suffering, the more readily as she too was grieving at separation from the same son. In fact, however, though Kowsalya grieved she was not sharing the King's grief. She felt that her grief was her own and that the King's sorrow could not be the same as hers. It seemed to her also that he was the cause of the evil that had befallen her, not merely a victim like herself. She saw him, besides, as the agent of her rival's will. He might grieve after serving that rival, but that he had served her remained, and that rival herself was enjoying the fruits of that service. So far from comforting her grief-stricken husband, Kowsalya, therefore, heaped accusations upon him. "Rama is gone, Kaikeyi is causing me fear like a serpent which has sloughed. You drove out Rama on her account and have brought me to this condition. What is to happen to the three who have gone to the wilderness and when shall I see them again? When will Rama, sitting in the chariot with Sita in front of him, re-enter Ayodhya? I should in a previous life have hindered a calf as it went to suck. That should be why now I am sonless with a son. I have but one son and I cannot live without him." Sumitra intervened and tried to mollify Kowsalya. Her own sorrow was not smaller than Kowsalya's. Yet her nature was such that she would not give expression to her sorrow but would rather help another in hers. "Sister Kowsalya, your son is righteous. Why should we grieve about such a man? The great man who has carried out his father's promise and earned a name for himself as a righteous man

and is walking in a path of truth is not an object for sorrow. Rama is not alone. There is Lakshmana with him and there is Sita. What will your son lack, o righteous and so true. The sun will know his devotion to truth and desist from doing harm to that body. The wind blowing through the woods will touch him so as to please him. When in the night Rama lies down the moon will envelop him with his beams and delight him as a father delights his son. With his strong arm Rama is as safe in the forest as in the palace. What harm can come to him, whether in the city or in the country? He may wear the garb of a beggar but is invincible. With him is Sita the goddess of his fortune. What can he lack? Before him goes mighty Lakshmana holding his bow and arrows. What can Rama lack in such case? Know that you have as good as seen your son come back after the years of exile. Give up this sorrow and this weakness. Your son will return to Ayodhya very soon and will press your feet with those hands of his so soft and full. You will shed on him as he is bowing to you tears of joy like the clouds showering drops on a mighty hill.

### THE DEATH OF DASARATHA

Five sad and weary days the King and queens spent in this fashion when having left Sita, Rama and Lakshmana at the boundary of the kingdom Sumantra returned. The people ran behind Sumantra asking, Where is Rama? When he told them that he had left him on the banks of the Ganges they wailed in sorrow and turned away. This



charioteer who took Rama is coming alone. How will he speak to Kowsalya?" said the wives of Dasaratha to one another. Sumantra himself had not found it easy to leave Rama and return to the city. He had conducted himself with restraint until the moment of separation. When Rama and Lakshmana and Sita had to go forward and he to return, the old charioteer bent under the weight of his sorrow. As Rama prepared to get into the boat, the old man asked the princes. "What are your commands to me?" Rama told him to go to the city. Sumantra said, "That he cannot deviate from the course prescribed for it, appears from this, that a man like you has to suffer exile. Seeing you in this grievous plight I fear that self-restraint, kindness, rectitude and all such qualities avail nothing. Going to the wilderness with Sita and Lakshmana, you are losing nothing. It is we, Rama, that are ruined. We lose you and shall have to serve Kaikeyi." Rama comforted him. "The Kings of the line of Ikshvaku have no greater friend than you. Go, Sumantra, and do whatever is necessary to see that my father is not unhappy. He is old and crushed by sorrow, misled by infatuation for a woman. So I beg you, do all that is possible to ensure that he will not feel humiliated and crushed. Tell him I said this respectfully. It does not grieve me to be leaving Ayodhya and going to the wilderness. Lakshmana is not grieved nor is Sita. We shall complete the fourteen years of exile and return. You will see us. And, Sumantra, having said this to my father, say it to my mother also. Tell all the queens as also Queen Kaikeyi that we are well. Convey our respects to

all the three and to mother Kowsalya and tell her we are well. Let them bring Bhārata without delay and in tell him. Tell them that I said that the pain of separation from us will become less when they have made him Yuvārāja and have embraced him in love. Also say this to Bhārata. He should conduct himself to all the queens as he does to the King. Among the queens let him not discriminate between one and another. As much as Kaikeyi is to you or even more is Sumitra. So should be my mother Kowsalya. Having attained kingship do that which will bring joy to the King and obtain true happiness here and hereafter. When Rama told him that he might leave Sumantra broke down and said. I speak from the courage born of love. Consider my devotion to you and forgive me. How shall I return to the city without you? How shall I look on the people sad from thought of you? How shall I hear and bear the sad cries of Ayodhya? I am unable to return to Ayodhya without you. I beg you to take me with you. If you cannot take me and leave me I shall throw myself with the chariot into the fire. I shall be able to spend the fourteen years with you in the forest as if it were a moment. It does not become you to desert a devoted servant like me. Rama had to reconcile him to the idea of returning to Ayodhya. I know he said how greatly you are attached to me. Yet I know you should return to Ayodhya. Queen Kaikeyi will then be certain that we have gone to the forest. Otherwise she might think that we have not carried out the promise made by the King. To prove that we have done it you have to return.

When, after all this, Sumantra came to the presence of the King and gave him Rama's parting words, the King fell down unconscious. Sumitra and Kowsalya lifted him up and helped him to sit and Kowsalya said "Why are you silent to the charioteer who has carried out your commands and returned? For fear of whom is it that you are silent and do not question Sumantra about Rama? Kaikeyi is not here, do not fear, speak." Speaking in this way words which would hurt the King, the grief-stricken queen wailed aloud, and, unable to say anything for stammering, fell prone on the ground. Dasaratha asked Sumantra about Sita, Rama and Lakshmana. "What did Rama say, what did Lakshmana say, what did Sita say? Tell me in detail everything about Rama's movements, of his sitting, sleeping and taking food." Sumantra repeated in detail the words that Rama and Lakshmana spoke at the moment of parting, as also earlier and said "The daughter of Janaka heaved deep sighs and stood like one unconscious, stricken in spirit. Grieved by hardship of which she has no experience, Sita wept. She spoke no word." The King realised what all this meant. "I have done grievous harm for the sake of a woman. If any grace for me is yet left, go and bring Rama here or take me to where he is. If I do not see him I shall die. What greater tragedy is there than that, in my present condition, I cannot see Rama? Oh Rama, Oh Lakshmana, Oh Videhi, you do not see me dying of grief like one friendless." He again became unconscious. Kowsalya feared for the King at this moment. Dasaratha regained consciousness and said to Sumantia "I cannot live without

Rama Take me to where those three are Kowsalya herself joined her words to the Kings and asked Sumantra to take her to where her sons and daughter-in-law were Sumantra folded his hands to them and said Give up this weeping and despair Let there be no more of this agitation from grief Rama is at peace where he is in the forest Lakshmana also serving his elder brother is enjoying a happy position Though in the unpeopled wilds Sita with her mind set on Rama is fearless and has peace I saw in her no sign of depression She seemed to me quite able to live in exile She will move about in the solitude of the forests as she strolled for pleasure in the gardens of Ayodhya As they go along their way Sita asks them what town this is what village that one what river this and what kind of tree that and Rama or Lakshmana will tell her She will be happy as if she was within a few miles of Ayodhya The words that Sita spoke of Queen Kaikeyi occur to me now What these words were Sumantra did not say They could not have been words to be repeated He broke off and said I have forgotten what she said and then spoke words of comfort to Rama's mother The exertion of the journey and the sun and air have not affected Sita's face Her feet which knew the *alaktaka* wash every day are still tender as ever without it They are naturally of the colour of *alaktaka* and their look is the look of the lotus bud She has removed her jewels in walking with her husband from love of him yet she steps with the same grace as when she walked with anklets on her feet What has occurred is not a matter for grief

Look at it how you may, whether from their point of view or ours or the King's or anyone else's. This conduct has become a noble record for ever on this earth. Let us therefore be happy." In the fervour of her pain Kowsalya reviled the King. "You were responsible for my son being exiled. You denied yourself to me and now you have denied me my son. You have ruined me every way." These harsh words of Kowsalya pierced the heart of the King. He had become unconscious several times since Rama left. He became unconscious again. Coming to himself a little later and regaining vision with a deep sigh and seeing Kowsalya sitting beside him he became again agitated. "Queen," he said, "I have wronged you, be gracious to me. I fold my hands to you. You have pity in your heart, you are not cruel. You are gracious to others, be not otherwise to me. Whether he is a good man or an evil the husband to his righteous wife is God himself. You are firm in righteousness. However sorrow might shake you, speak not cruelly to me in my sorrow." The King's tone of supplication made the Queen repent. She felt that she had gone too far. She hastened to make amends and, stammering in her eagerness, she said to him "I bow to you and beg. I prostrate before you and ask. Do not hurt me by saying that you beg or pray. Let me not be subjected to this punishment. I know the laws of righteousness. You are a man of truth. I know that all this has come in consequence of that virtue. Yet in the sorrow of separation from my son, I out of a stricken heart have spoken strangely. Grief destroys self-control. It destroys man's sense

of right and wrong. Man has no enemy like grief. Five days have passed since Rama went to the forest. They have been as five years to me. Evening came and the King went into a stupor. In the middle of the night he woke up, told Kowsalya (if this is not an interpolation) the story of his killing when young, the son of an ascetic mistaking him for a wild animal and said that he was now dying in his son's absence in consequence of the curse given him by the ascetic on that day. The sorrow of not seeing Rama is drying up my life as the sun dries up shallow waters. Fortunate are they who when my son returns at the end of his fourteen years of exile will see that beautiful face of his, those cheeks, that nose, those eyes, that face pleasing as the moon and bright like a blown lotus. Not men but immortals are they, Queen, my mind is clouding, my senses are failing, my sorrow is carrying away my vital powers as a flood the banks of a stream. Oh my son, my Raghava, long armed hero, dear to your father, ruler of my life, where are you? Oh Kowsalya, I am dying. Oh Sumitra, embodiment of self control. Oh Kaikeyi, heartless, hateful enemy of my lineage, he cried and as Kowsalya and Sumitra looked on, ended his life.

#### BHARATA'S RETURN

The citizens of Ayodhya when they learnt that Dasaratha was dead, assembled with Vasishtha and other ministers and deciding that Bharata should be crowned King, sent messengers to him. There in his uncle's house Bharata had spent a restless night full of bad dreams and was wondering in the morning what

it could mean, when the messengers from Ayodhya came. They did not give the news of Dasaratha's death but told Bharata and his uncle that the prince was required for urgent affairs and that the ministers wanted him to return immediately. Bharata asked the messengers of the welfare of his father, and brothers and mothers. "Those whose welfare you desire," said they, "are well. Fortune smiles on you. Pray start without delay." Bharata took his uncle's permission, finished the long journey with speed and reached Ayodhya. The city shone from a distance, beautiful in the midst of the gardens around, but he heard no sounds of its usual busy life. The parks were empty of people and the town seemed like a desert. There were no elephants or horses or chariots in the streets. The dry leaves fallen on the garden paths stood unswept, the gardens were silent, with no sound of bird or beast. The air of the city was ordinarily fragrant with the sweet scents which the households used for decoration and worship. That air was now scentless. It used ordinarily to be full of sweet sounds made by tambourine and veena, drum and cymbal. No such sound was audible now. Fear entered Bharata's heart. "The state of the city," he said to the charioteer, "leads me to fear that some evil has happened. The manner of these houses and these temples, of the market places and of the people, bodes evil." Passing through the silent town, he reached his father's palace. Not finding him there he came to his mother's palace. Bharata had no great opinion of his mother. In asking the messengers if his mother was well, he had described her in language

not very complimentary. As Bharata approached her Kaikeyi left her seat and walked to him joyously. Whatever Kaikeyi's faults might have been there was no doubt that she loved her son. It was however not from love of him that he had obtained the kingdom for him. Kowsalya should not become dominant she Kaikeyi should remain dominant. For this purpose it was necessary that Rama should not become king and that Bharata should. It was on this account that she had begged for two favours from the King. In asking for kingship for her son she was thinking not of that son but of herself. That was how in asking for the favours her mind failed to consider what Bharata would like. Not that he should be happy but that he should be the instrument of securing her position was the motive that had impelled her. When Kaikeyi rose and came to meet him Bharata prostrated to her in reverence. Kaikeyi took her son in her arms and sitting down seated him on her lap and enquired if her father and brother and others were well. Bharata told her that they were all well and finishing these enquiries quickly said to her. The words of the messengers have brought me here with great speed. Pray answer me quickly. This couch is empty. The people in the palace seem to be in grief. The King used to be here always. I came to see him and did not find him here. Is he in the palace of Kowsalya? Kaikeyi gave him the news of the King's death as if it ought to please him. Your father she said has reached the end of the journey of all created things. The great and noble King has entered the final abode of righteous



men" At these words of his mother Bharata fell on the ground and wept aloud for his father His mother remonstrated with him "My son, why should you lie on the ground? The like of you should not shed tears Rise, rise" Bharata, however, persisted in his grief and then said to his mother "Fortunate are Rama and Lakshmana who sat by my father and served him, while I was myself absent If my father had been alive he would have called to me on my return and caressed me What did he say when dying? I wish to hear his last words" Kaikeyi said "The King died crying out, Oh, Rama, Oh, Sita, Oh, Lakshmana These were his last words Fortunate are they, he said, who will see Rama return with Sita and Lakshmana" Bharata did not understand He wondered what had happened and felt afraid and asked "Where did my righteous brother go with Sita and Lakshmana?" "He went with them," said Kaikeyi, "to the wilderness wearing ascetic robes" This made Bharata fear for his brother's conduct The custom of the house of Ikshvaku was that, for a prince to be condemned to exile, he should be guilty of some mighty offence So he asked his mother "Did Rama seize property belonging to a Brahmin, did he maltreat an innocent person or show inclination for another's woman? Why did they drive him to the wilderness?" "Rama seized no Brahmin's property" said Kaikeyi "He maltreated no innocent person, nor even raised his eyes to another's woman I heard that he was going to be installed and begged your father for your installation and Rama's exile Your father, being righteous, granted my wish, and

Rama with Sita and Lakshmana left for the forest. The King died of the sorrow of separation from his beloved son. Assume this kingship my son for whom I have done all this. Do not sorrow nor weep take courage. This kingdom and this city are yours bating nothing. Perform your father's obsequies and get the crown. The steps of this narration are worth following. From the statement that the King's last words were so and so to Kaikeyi's direction to Bharata to get crowned the dialogue moves in steps at each of which Bharata is more and more bewildered. Kaikeyi expected that her son would be very grateful to her for having got Rama exiled even when there was not the slightest reason for it and having secured the throne for him the younger. This younger brother however reviled his mother for what she imagined his gain. You have slain the King he said and driven Rama to exile. What shall I do with this kingship? Rama conducted himself towards you exactly as he did to his own mother. My elder mother Kowsalya is a far sighted lady. She treated you with consideration as a sister. What cause was there then for you to drive Rama to exile? If these eyes may not see Rama and Lakshmana what is the strength with which I can rule a kingdom? Or supposing I do have the strength I tell you I am not going to fulfil your wish. In our lineage it is the eldest that succeeds to the throne. This law of our house has been fouled by you. I do not concur with such defiance of the right. I shall go to the wilderness and bring Rama back and stand by him as servant. Bharata was wrathful and was shouting. Kowsalya

in her palace heard his voice and knew he had come back "Bharata," she said to Sumitra, "son of the heartless Kaikeyi has come back He is a far-sighted man I should see him" She then started to go to him At the same time Bharata together with Satiughna came towards her palace Broken down by grief Kowsalya became unconscious and fell prone on the ground Bharata took her up The Queen said to Bharata "You desired the Kingdom You have now got it unscathed Your mother's heartlessness got it for you with speed What crime did Kaikeyi's hard and critical eyes see in my son to drive him to the wilderness in beggar's clothes? It is proper for Kaikeyi to drive me also to where my son is without delay, or I myself shall go there with Sumitra, or you might take us and leave us there" As Kowsalya spoke these unkind words to him, Bharata folded his hands to her and said "Lady, why do you blame an innocent person? I know nothing of all this I loved Rama greatly You know that that love is unshaken To him by whose desire Rama has been exiled, may such and such a sin come" and he enumerated as his meed, if he had acquiesced in Rama's exile, the sins due for a hundred detestable offences Cursing himself thus in a hundred ways he lay on the ground Kowsalya had not thought that he would be so moved She more or less knew that he had not wished for Rama's exile but wanted to be told so by him When she got this assurance she said to him "My sorrow is rising again by your cursing yourself and is hurting me It pleases me, my son, that you have not deviated from the right path Virtuous one,

you will win the seat of the worthy. She then took Bharata on her lap and held him in her arms and wept. Vasishtha came and suggested to Bharata that it was time for beginning the obsequies of the dead king. When they were over Bharata told all of them his intention to go to the forest to bring back Rama and got arrangements made. In the meanwhile Satrugna lost his temper and laid hands on Manthara for having been the cause of all this misery. Bharata interfered and told him to let her go. I have felt inclined to slay my mother for what she has done but have held my hand for fear of Rama. If Rama should know that we touched Manthara he would for ever refuse to speak to us.

#### HIS FRUITLESS PILGRIMAGE

Some time had passed since Rama with Sita and Lakshmana crossed the Ganges by the help of Guha the ruler of a hunting tribe and moved into the forests on the farther side. He had met Bharadwaja and by his advice moved on to Chitrakoota. Guha and Bharadwaja were both displeased with the thought of Rama having been exiled. When Bharata with a large following came some time later the same way Guha suspected his motive. Was not this man satisfied with his brother being exiled? What further injury did he wish to do him? When Bharata made enquiries Guha told him of Rama, Sita and Lakshmana staying with him for a day and then crossing the Ganges. Guha's description of a day's life in Rama's exile caused unbearable pain to Bharata. He fell down in grief. Satrugna who was beside him took

him in his arms and wept. The mothers gathered round them weeping. Kowsalya also came and looked at Bharata. "My son," she said, "I hope you are not ill. The fate of this royal house depends on you now. Rama having gone to the wilderness along with his brother, we are holding on to life because of you. Dasaratha being dead, you are the master of the household and have now to protect all of us. What makes you so broken-hearted? Did you get bad news? Has anything happened to Lakshmana or to my only son with his queen?" Kowsalya dreaded evil for her son in proportion to her love. When Bharata and Satrugna raised their voices in lamentation, she feared what further harm may have happened. Her anxiety in the first instance was no doubt for Rama. Then it touched Lakshmana. These were away in the forest. If Bharata was unwell it should have come after. But her enquiries related to Bharata first in the first place from an innate sense of propriety, secondly because he had taken the proper attitude towards Rama, and thirdly because the welfare of the royal household now centred round him. Her next question related to Lakshmana. That too shows her magnanimity. Bharata assured her that there was no cause for anxiety. He then asked Guha to show the places where Rama sat and what he ate and where he slept. At the spot where Sita had lain, threads from her garment had caught in the grass. The sight of these threads brought home to Bharata the hardships to which his loved ones were condemned. "Cursed am I," he said, "that on my account it has become necessary for my sister-in-law,

so tenderly brought up born in a line of emperors honoured by the whole world beloved by all to be on such ground My handsome brother of the light dark complexion and beautiful eyes fit only for comfort and not fit for hardship how did he bear living on the ground? Happy is I and human greatly fortunate that he is with Rama at this sad time Spending a day in Bharadwaja's hermitage and learning from him the direction in which Rama had proceeded Bharata journeyed to Chitrakoota Rama and Lakshmana became aware of the approach of a concourse of people Rama said to Lakshmana

Some prince or other person of kingly rank seems to have come hunting See Lakshmana climbed up a tall tree looked in the direction of the approaching army and said Put out the fire brother and go into the cave with Sita and keep bow and arrows and coat of mail ready Rama asked him Whose is the army do you think? Lakshmana in flaming temper said Having got the kingdom into his hands Kaikeyi's son Bharata is coming to take our lives He on whose account we have been subjected to intolerable suffering he for whose sake you were pushed out of the throne that enemy is approaching us I hold him worthy of being slain I cannot think that it would be sinful to take his life I am going to slay Kaikeyi with her relatives and following To this outburst of his angry brother Rama replied in words of peace

Bharata is valiant He is wise When he approaches what is the use for bow and arrow and shield? What shall I do with a kingdom which I may get by falsifying my father's promise and slaying a brother

who approaches me of his own accord? I desire goodness, wealth and comfort all for your sakes. If it is not for you and except through righteousness, I would not have the throne of Indra. The pleasure that comes to me, living without Bharata or you or Satrugna, it is fit for the fire. It occurs to me that Bharata whom I love more than myself is coming to see us, out of brotherly affection and in obedience to the custom of our house, in love and sorrow. I am certain that he has spoken harsh words to his mother, conducted himself with great consideration to our father and come to give me the kingdom. When did Bharata ever do you unkindness that now you suspect him? You seem to value kingship greatly, to speak so of Bharata. That same kingship I shall ask Bharata to give you. If I tell him to give it, he will immediately agree. You will see." These words of Rama shamed Lakshmana beyond measure. He shrank into himself. The brothers then wondered whether their father himself had come. The elephants and the horses were the father's but the state umbrella was not there. This made Rama fear. Bharata reached the wood in which Rama lived and looking for the hermitage came to it alone and without a following. He saw from a distance his elder brother in his matted locks. His heart filled with sorrow to see his valiant brother, king of the earth even to the utmost boundary, seated on the ground on a mat of grass. He ran to Rama and, in words that were indistinct from crying said "My brother who should have been waited on by his subjects is now attended by wild animals. He, whom a hundred garments should have decorated, is

wearing deer skin. The body that used to be rubbed with sandal, how this is it now treated with the dust. On my account has all this evil befallen him. Heartless am I and my life has resulted in sin and crying out, brother, he fell before quite reaching Rama's feet and could speak no more. Satrugna also came up and did obeisance to Rama. Rama took them in his arms and embraced them. He then seated Bharata on his lap and asked, 'Where is our father? You should not have left him in the city and come away to the forest. Is he well?' and similarly put him a number of questions hoping that he was ruling the kingdom according to the ancient law. Bharata said, 'What can the law of kingship do for me whose life has been a breach of all law. With the elder alive the younger never becomes king in our lineage. Pray return to Ayodhya and become king. You came away here. I was in the Kekaya country and in sorrow the king died. Perform his obsequies. You were dear to him and that which you give will yield endless satisfaction to him in the world of the fathers.' The news of his father's death shocked Rama. He fell on the ground and he and Sita wept aloud. Rama said to Bharata, 'Without my father what shall I do with Ayodhya? Who is going to rule Ayodhya now he has gone?' Bharata, you and Satrugna are fortunate. You performed the last rites of our father. Where again shall I hear those loving and sweet words that our father said to me in days gone by? He then went with Sita to Mandakini and bathed in it and offered oblations to his father's spirit with some woodland preparation.



Kowsalya said to Sumitra "Here is your son serving his elder brother out of deep love" And looking at the offerings to Dasaratha's spirit she said "I look at this offering made by Rama and yet my heart remains unbroken" At that moment she saw Rama before her looking like a God fallen from the heavens. She raised her voice in lamentation to see him in that condition. The fact that Rama had to offer to his father some preparation of the wilderness hurt Kowsalya and the other queens deeply. Rama left his seat, approached his mother and touched her feet. He made the same obeisance to the other mothers. Lakshmana and Sita followed him and offered reverence to all. Kowsalya took Sita in her arms like a daughter and said "I am burning with sorrow to see the hardship which the daughter of Videha, daughter-in-law of Dasaratha and Rama's queen has to suffer" By this time Vasishtha came up. Rama did obeisance to him also. When the courtesies of meeting were over, Rama asked Bharata what brought him to the forest and was told why he had come. "Let the whole world, now kingless, have a king in you as the clear night of autumn in the bright full moon. This, I and our ministers all beg of you with bowed heads. I am your younger brother and disciple and servant and you should be gracious to me. The population which has been handed down to us by our forefathers and is ever ours, that population you ought not to desert and go away" Bharata said all this prostrating to Rama and in the course of the request said some harsh words about his mother Kaikeyi. Rama said in reply "Brother, you come of

a noble household You are noble yourself valiant and true How can it be said that you have done anything improper to get this kingship? I see no grain of offence in you You should not blame mother Kaikeyi either That would be boyishness All the time that you show respect to our father all that time should you show respect to the mother Now it is your and my business to carry out the arrangements that our father prescribed I shall enjoy my fourteen years of life in the forest as the portion given to me by my father You in the same way enjoy kingship Bharata pressed his request again the next day Again Rama gave the same reply and explained the notion of righteousness which dictated his course of conduct Man is not free to do what he likes He is an instrument in the hand of fate All joy has an end and life itself ends in death The days pass never to return and the seasons which we welcome with such pleasure really bring the end nearer The King their father had lived a good life and won a place in Heaven It was now for them the sons to walk in the way their forefathers had walked and reach the same goal Not pleasure here but a good world after death should be man's aim and he should lose no time in ensuring it They would do it by fulfilling the promise of their father Bharata said to his brother Is there another in the world like you? Sorrow does not bend you Joy does not puff you up Your spirit is great as the spirit of an immortal Noble of soul striving after righteousness knowing and seeing all are you I beg you brother consider what Dasaratha did as something done in

the clouded hours of approaching death. What my mother did was grievous wrong. Let us therefore forget those things. Come now to Ayodhya and rule over all of us." Rama declined again. One of the wise men who accompanied Bharata by name Jabali remonstrated with Rama. "Respect a father and obey his words but on their account you should not fail to do what is obviously correct. It is right for you to come back to Ayodhya as Bharata is begging you to-day and to rule." Rama rebuked him and refused to accept this doctrine of negation. Truth, he said, was the substance of charity, it was the practice of kings from ancient time. Kingship was essentially truth and the world stood in virtue of truth. Truthfulness was the highest of all duties. It was the root of all existence and there was no heaven other than truth. Vasishtha told him that Jabali was talking no doctrine of negation but was merely explaining the custom of the Ikshvakus by which the elder ruled and which Rama had now to obey. "Three are considered elders to any man, he said enforcing his request. "Three, namely, the teacher, the father and the mother. That you should be king is desired both by your mother and by me." Rama said "My father gave his word that something should be done. I am unable to make that false." Bharata threatened to stay there without food and sleep by way of protest. Rama dissuaded him. No king should resort to such a course. Bharata begged the elders who had followed him from Ayodhya to appeal to Rama. They said that Rama had decided on the right course and they could not ask him to act differently. Rama's decision

should be accepted Bharata said again I did not ask my father to make me king I never spoke of this to my mother I never gave my consent to my brother going to the forest If my father's word has to be carried out I shall go to exile Rama said finally To take away any tittle from our father's word neither I nor Bharata is competent If I were unable to suffer exile my brother could have suffered it for me That is not the case now and I cannot use him as substitute Bharata is considerate and respects his elders I am sure of that I shall return after my years of exile and shall be king with my righteous brother When all his efforts to persuade his brother to come back to Ayodhya were thus vain Bharata asked him to give him his footwear Rama gave it to him Bharata offered respects to it and told his brother Fourteen years I shall wear ascetic robes like yourself and eat as you are eating root and fruit and stay beyond the precincts of Ayodhya awaiting your return The kingship of our country is vested in your footwear If on the day next after the fourteen years are over I do not look on you I enter fire Rama agreed He then embraced Bharata as also Satrughna and said to Bharata Be kind to your mother Show no anger to her I lay this injunction on you in my name and in Sita's name The mothers were unable to say anything for weeping Rama himself wept as he entered his hermitage Bharata Satrughna the mothers and teachers and all the following returned to Ayodhya

## VI THE STORY AND FOUR CHARACTERS

### THE MANNER OF THE NARRATIVE

HERE ends the story of the second book. Rama spent some short time after this in that part of the country and proceeded south and after a short stay in various places reached the hermitage of Atri and Anasuya and with their blessings entered the deeper forests. The story has been given at some length substantially as told by Valmiki. The story of Rama is known to all and to give any long summary of it may seem unnecessary but what we want for appreciating Valmiki is not a general impression of the story of the Ramayana but the way in which Valmiki told it. What did Dasaratha do and say when he found that he had to send his son to the forest? In our words, we might say that he wailed and refused but this would not give us a picture of Dasaratha as Valmiki made it. For this purpose we have to know the words used by Valmiki and these words all do not know. That is the justification for making a summary in the words of Valmiki. What is given here is, however, not all the words uttered by all the characters in the original. The story summarised here is spread over a very wide area in Valmiki's poem. It is quite common for any one character to express one sentiment over eight or ten verses. As in full length portraiture or sculpture all the details of a figure are worked out, so in his epic

narrative of the occurrences in the palace and discussion in the forest the poet gives us all the details without any feeling of haste or fatigue. As in the play of the waters on the seashore the waves come one after another adding to the height and one of them finally seems to touch the sky and crashes on the sands so in Valmiki's poem the sentiments are worked up by addition of statement after statement and press on our emotions in a crescendo of effect. Thus in each speech there are several stages and in each stage several steps. Valmiki's is a spacious art living on detail. It is an art which knows no diffidence. There is no way of enjoying the Ramayana so good as the way that custom has prescribed of reading it day after day by small portions. The poet is telling the story without haste and without fatigue. The reader or the listener should attend to it without haste and without fatigue. The object here should be not to reach the end of the story. Every step in it is as important as the conclusion. The joy of reading epic poetry is not the joy of reading the last verse. Each verse is matter for contemplation. Each verse should be turned over in the mind and tasted all round. In a manner so full of detail does the poem of Valmiki express his view of the life of mankind.

That life has been described with the same spaciousness by perhaps no other poem in the world's literature. The King and his three queens are each a person of different type. Their four children are persons each of a different temperament. The charioteer and the teacher the ministers and the servant maid of the second queen are also important

characters These many characters are shown in many significant situations in the course of the story, each trying to act on the environment, each responding to that environment They are so described, that they become real persons moving in our presence So numerous an assemblage of characters is not shown in so large a number of situations in any poem except the Mahabharata The Mahabharata, however, is not so much a poem as a history Its spaciousness is, besides, the result of a large number of subsidiary narratives included within it While the *Ayodhya Kanda* is the life of a royal household for a few days the Mahabharata is the description of the life of a kingdom The story of the Ramayana has thus a unity which we do not get in the Mahabharata, and the *Ayodhya Kanda* by itself is characterised by singular freedom from excursions and by neatness and economy in narration

#### DASARATHA

Valmiki's knowledge of human nature was extraordinary both in quality and width His manner of picturing that nature is equally wonderful This is the impression produced whatever character we take up for examination Dasaratha is really the centre of the story of this *Kanda* He had married three women, possibly because he did not have children by the first and the second wives He cared for his eldest queen and honoured her but he was infatuated with his third queen Valmiki describes in detail the circumstances of his making a promise to this third wife and getting into an impossible situation and then

how he tried to escape from it now by abusing Kaikeyi now by showing anger once by begging once by cursing himself again by telling Kaikeyi that on Rama's going to the forest he the King would die and then Kaikeyi would have to rule the kingdom a widow with her on. So the old King is shown exhibiting a hundred mood and hurting himself in all like a worm that has fallen on live coals and turns from side to side only to ensure that he is burnt all round. To a nature like Dasaratha's this conduct is perfectly natural in such circumstances. It is sometimes stated that the King out of love for his younger queen exiled Rama willingly and that this conduct was improper in him. This description of Dasaratha's conduct is very fatuous and can proceed from no one who has read Valmiki. The idea of Rama's exile was perfectly distasteful to the old King. He however was caught in a trap being a man of his word he was unable to escape from a promise. If someone had forced him to fulfil Dasaratha would have been happy. If Kaikeyi her elf had released him from what amounted to a promise he would have been grateful if someone else had done it he would have rejoiced. If for example Rama had said that he would not go to the forest and insisted on being installed as Yuvaraja the King would have rejoiced so far as his position was concerned. Lakshmana said in a rage

What will not this old man in his infatuation for his young wife do? You become king brother and I shall put this fellow down. What Lakshmana said in rage against his father that father said of himself to Rama. Put me down and become king he



suggested. When all attempts at altering the course of events failed and Rama had to leave for the forest, the King said that he should go with a good following and provision and wealth. When the son started for the forest, this king came to the street and stood there watching his chariot go. In the first moment of reading that the King and the queens came to the street in this manner and ran behind the chariot, we ask ourselves "Can this be, king and queens running in this manner?" Yet we understand the next moment that those who came to the street and ran behind the chariot are not king and queens but a father and mothers. Kings and queens are great on their thrones for ruling and commanding, for the joy and sorrow of life, they are just human creatures. Dasaratha after long waiting performed a sacrifice and prayed to the gods for children. When two of the sons whom he got in old age went out to the forest, he stood on the road and derived consolation by looking at the dust that his sons' chariot threw up. This is a shape that the love of a father takes in such a case. The state of mind in which the King said that his sight which had followed Rama had not returned is truly described. It is noteworthy that Dasaratha does not say that his eye had followed Lakshmana. How much did the old man care for his three younger sons? His treatment of Kaikeyi and rejecting her assistance when he fell down after Rama left is equally natural. Just as natural is his going to Kowsalya's palace rather than anywhere else to give up life, his remembering the adventure of his youth in which he had slain a son of old parents and

telling himself that his sorrow to day was retribution for the sorrow he had caused on that day. Even so is the state of mind in which he is shown in the very last moment. At that moment he remembered and called on the sons and the daughter in law whom he had driven to exile. He called to Kowsalya and Sumitra in words of affection and praise and last of all he named Kaikeyi and all but cursed her. Man it is said remembers on the brink of death the things he loves most and hates most. This was true of Dasaratha and in the hundred situations and speeches that appear in the life of the old king we do not once ask why this thing was said or that thing was done. All that is stated makes one consistent whole and one consistent picture. That picture is the picture of a person whom we know very well. That person's name is Dasaratha. So real does the man Dasaratha become to us that if someone should ask what he did on an occasion not dealt with in the poem we are likely to attempt to remember and tell. The poet not merely communicates but evokes knowledge of human character.

#### KOWSALYA

The picture of Kowsalya is similarly full and complete. Kowsalya was the eldest queen. The arrival of a beauty as junior had deprived her of the importance which she should have had as the enthroned queen. This had been a source of unhappiness in her life. Kowsalya knew that her husband respected her but respect by itself gives no satisfaction to a wife. Kowsalya needed her husband's love. Such

love, however, as his nature was capable of in those years was centred in the younger woman. Kowsalya was in consequence less liberal in her appointments than Kaikeyi. There is a suggestion in the story that the servants of the palace thought her close-fisted. She desired, therefore, that her son should come into power, that in consequence she might live as became her position. The elder queen appears to have had fears that Kaikeyi might take advantage of the King's infatuation for her and ask that Bharata should be made king. The words that Kowsalya said to Rama when he brought her news of the intended installation suggest the existence of such fear. Kowsalya thought of Sumitra always as a friend. So when Rama told her that he was to be Yuvaraja, Kowsalya praised the King and began a special ceremony of thanksgiving. This ceremony, however, came to an end very quickly. As she felt elated with good news, so Kowsalya felt cast down with bad news. The words that she uttered when she learnt of the proposed exile of her son are words that any mother may utter. Was it for this that she bore a son? People who have no children have only the one pain that they have not got them but they are protected from calamity of the sort that came to her. It was wonder to Kowsalya that even after hearing that her one and deeply beloved child should go to the forest, she held on to life and her heart did not break. Again and again she begs Rama to take her with him. Rama had to argue on grounds of propriety and righteousness a hundred times before he could persuade her to give up this idea. Like many others in the story, and perhaps also outside,

Kowsalya was unable to understand that Rama's reason for insisting on going to the forest was more his own desire to make his father's promise true than that father's command that the son should go to exile. Lakshmana was unable to understand this fact just as Kowsalya was and proposed that he would put down the father and make his elder brother king. The suggestion appealed to Kowsalya and she asked Rama seriously to consider if he should not take that course. When finally Rama refused to do anything else and insisted on going to the forest the old mother submitted to his decision and gave him her blessings. The manner of blessing was just such as an old mother like Kowsalya would adopt. Indra in the past started to vanquish Vritra. On that occasion his mother gave him her blessings. "May you my son at this moment of your going on this perilous journey have the same blessings." And so she spoke the blessings of great mothers uttered on great occasions when their valorous sons started on perilous journeys to win fame and prosperity in the teeth of danger and from the jaws of death. Kowsalya was present with Dasaratha throughout the last hours of Rama's parting from his father. She knew how the old king's soul was harrowed by the grief of separation from his son. When he ran tottering behind the son's car she kept pace with him running. When he reviled Ankeya and elected to go to Kowsalya's palace the queen was present and stayed with him. All this however did not remove from her mind the anger against the King that he had carried out the other woman's wish and driven her son to exile. The fact

came up in her mind again and again, and her heart flamed in wrath. To this poor woman's nature it was inevitable and necessary to give vent to that wrath in speech. She, therefore, gave profuse expression to her sorrow and added to the sorrow in the King's heart which she should have tried to soothe. In the words that she utters in this situation it looks as if Kowsalya did not realise that her husband's grief was in no sense less than her own. It looks as if she thought that it was very difficult for her because her one son was going away and not so difficult for the King as he had other sons left. Many are the people with fewer children who apply this absurd mathematics of parenthood to those who have more. To her mind, Rama was her son, not Dasaratha's, as to Kaikeyi's, Bharata was hers, not Dasaratha's. Only Sumitra, if even she, seems to have been free of this feeling of proprietorship in regard to her sons. The queens owned their sons in a sense in which they could not own the King and he could not own those sons. So Kowsalya at one stage makes boast of her son's valour to Dasaratha and says that Rama could have defied him and stayed but did not do so because he was good. When Sumantia returned and the King was unable to say anything to him, Kowsalya told him not to be afraid but to speak for Kaikeyi was not there. To prick the King even in such sorrow with insinuation seemed to her not improper. Not only in the larger events of his spacious narrative but in significant details of this kind does Valmiki exhibit his unfailing insight into the ways of man's heart, his completeness and correctness.

as of nature itself. When unable to hear insinuations and charges Dasaratha prayed for pardon. Kowsalya realised what her good nature was no doubt well aware of all the time that he suffered even as she suffered that he needed kindness from her as she needed kindness from him. Her revulsion was quick and from fault finding she stepped naturally to share his sorrow. From then onwards to the moment when the forlorn father closed his eyes the old mother sat beside him a companion in grief noble of heart and generous and feeling less self centred. Rama's mother was woman like all mothers but she was the woman that had borne Rama. The greatness which took shape in Rama proceeded from the greatness that dwelt within the woman Kowsalya. In the way in which she spoke to Bharata and accepted his assurance of friendship to Rama and never more said an unkind word to Kaikeyi Kowsalya showed the magnanimity of her nature. The eldest queen of Dasaratha is a complete and finished picture in Valmiki's narration even as is Dasaratha.

### KAIKEYI

Kaikeyi is another of these full length portraits. The whole world knew that this queen beloved of a potentate was a proud woman. Valmiki's narrative is full of suggestions that she was notorious on this account. Her own son Bharata refers to her in words that are not complimentary. She is an obstinate person and greatly concerted. Perhaps of all the people that knew her or did not know her there was only one who overlooked her faults or seemed not to know

them, and that was Rama. It was doubtless for this reason that Kaikeyi cherished Rama even as she did her son. She did not love Bharata more than Rama. When she first heard that Rama was to be installed, she rejoiced. She had no fears either for herself or for her son in consequence of Rama's accession to power. He would treat her with as much respect as he would his mother. He would treat Bharata with the affection of a father for his son. Yet she made up her mind to condemn him to exile. The reason for this was her envy of Kowsalya. The elder queen had no doubt occasionally exhibited her consciousness of her superiority as crowned queen and Kaikeyi's inferiority as mere wife. Kaikeyi's proud nature should have felt the insult implied in such treatment in all its strength. Her heart should have longed to return it in some shape. Rama's exile was the shape in which retribution could be made most grievous. That a parent should eat sour grapes and a child's teeth be set on edge is nothing new in life. The offence that Kowsalya had given to Kaikeyi came back in punishment on Kowsalya's son. Kaikeyi did not shrink from the thought that her son might stand with folded hands before Rama. She shrank from the thought of her standing so before her rival Kowsalya. For years she had been the centre of importance in the palace. She could not bear the thought of Kowsalya becoming that centre, displacing her. This was how no argument of the King's could move her from her determination. No argument could really remove the fear in her mind. She had no reason to urge in reply to reasons. Hers was mere fear and that too, fear which

she could not put into words. In all the discussions that took place after she made her requests we find that Kaikeyi was either silent or sparing of speech. One thing only she said. You wish to evade the promise you have made and live in happiness with Kowsalya and her son. Sumitra remonstrated with her. She said nothing. Visishtha addressed cruel words to her. She made no reply. Siddhartha remonstrated. She had no answer. The King shook her off and said that all ties between them were severed. She said nothing. She had acted cruelly. She knew this. What could she say having done what she had done? When Rama had gone one thought remained in her mind. Bharata should come and be crowned. It looks as if the King's death did not greatly grieve Kaikeyi. Bharata came to Ayodhya and made manifest to his unhappy mother the depth of her folly. She had behaved with extraordinary cruelty, exercised all the strength of her adventurous nature and won for her beloved son a throne and kingdom. She expected that that son would be grateful to her. For this kindness that son however gave her not thanks but foul abuse. When she asked Rama to go to the forest Kaikeyi got no abuse. When she asked her son to become king she was ignominiously reviled. Kaikeyi was however a fond mother and to the son's words of anger offered remonstrance asking what she had done to deserve his anger and said. Here is this kingdom which I have won for you rid of your rivals be king and rule over it. When her son refused the proposal and cursed himself for having been the occasion of Rama's exile and the



King's death, and made it known that he would follow Rama to bring him back from the forest, she submitted without one further word. Kaikeyi says no word after this in the Ramayana. One or two persons refer to her occasionally. Bharata and Lakshmana utter words of blame. Rama and Sita in moments of intense distress say, "What Kaikeyi wished is now fulfilled." In other moments they think of her in a spirit of forgiveness. When Lakshmana spoke of her in contumely, Rama asked him to stop such talk. When Bharata referred to his mother in language of disrespect, Rama told him that it was boyish conduct not worthy of him. When sending Bharata back to Ayodhya he laid a command on him that he should behave properly to his mother and enforced that command in his own name and in that of Sita. Rama's conduct in this context should not be understood as showing merely how good he was. It shows also how good Kaikeyi had been. Kaikeyi had asked for Rama's exile but that was only recently. She had loved him as her own son throughout their life previously. The unkindness of one day could not wipe off the memory of the long years of boyhood and youth. Kaikeyi had said that between Rama and Bharata her heart made no distinction. By years of such love Kaikeyi had ceased to be step-mother to Rama and become mother. It looks as if after one supreme act of cruelty she reverted to the old attitude of measureless affection. Kaikeyi had borne the thought of Rama's exile and the sorrow of the King's death in the hope that her son would become king. Once she saw that that son would not become king, it should

have struck her that the best conclusion to what had happened would be Rama's return to Avodhya. This should have been why Kaikeyi accompanied Bharata in his expedition to the forest to bring back his brother. If she had not concurred in his decision he could have stayed behind. Others who accompanied Bharata could join the expedition without any misgiving. They could all claim to be Rama's friend. Kaikeyi could make no such claim. She should have been aware that everyone disliked her and pointed the finger of scorn at her. Yet she went with them. Mere concurrence in her son's decision would perhaps not have been enough to make Kaikeyi accompany him. The fear of scorn might have made her remain in Avodhya. In Kaikeyi's nature however there was no room for fear of scorn. Such as she was she was a heroic woman. What she thought was desirable she did. The fear of what people might say never deterred her. The courage which led her in the face of universal opposition to insist on Rama's exile led her also to go with her son and see Rama and to be present when he was begged to return. The exile of Rama should ordinarily have been the more difficult of wishes to accomplish and his return to Avodhya the easier. Yet in this case the more difficult wish had been realised with ease and the easier wish became impossible and could not be realised. We are not told of Kaikeyi's state of mind when she found that the evil she had done could not be undone but we can imagine how unhappy the poor woman was. When Rama returned from exile he prostrated to Kaikeyi as he did to his other mothers. She must

have been as delighted as the others when he came. She must have been even more delighted. She had been the cause of his exile. She had brought about the death of her husband. She had made her own son a virtual exile living outside the precincts of Ayodhya wearing ascetic clothes and matted locks. Who could have hoped that fourteen years would pass and that those exiled would return in safety? Who could have been sure that Bharata would enter Ayodhya again with Rama? The days should have been heavy to Kaikeyi no less than to Kowsalya till Rama returned with Lakshmana and Sita and Bharata. Kaikeyi, let us admit, was self-centred, obstinate-minded, but at the same time it should be admitted that she loved her son. The root of Rama's magnanimity, it has been said, was in Kowsalya's nature. Similarly the root of Bharata's heroic firmness was in Kaikeyi's nature. Kaikeyi's great fault was to dislike an enemy and to love a son. Let us censure harm when it is harm but avoid the mistake of magnifying it and censuring it beyond reason. Every one in the story, Rama and Sita not excluded in moments of intense pain, has said a hard word of Kaikeyi. Valmiki never once refers to her in discourtesy. In this also we recognise the unfailing insight of a great poet into human nature.

#### SUMITRA

The portrait of Sumitra is worthy of standing beside those of Kowsalya and Kaikeyi. The conception of this character has been referred to earlier. Some people grow up in life thinking of themselves

as persons of consequence and of other around them as environment. Others grow in the belief that some one else is central and that they themselves are subsidiary figures in the scheme of life. Those who start with the idea that they are central learn from life sooner or later that there is something greater than themselves. The persons at the start are on that side of fortune's wheel which is going up. Their experience is complete only when their side of the wheel begins to go down. The other class knows neither the elation of ascent nor the disillusionment of descent. These people do not expect too much from life. When it gives them too little they are not discontented. As their expectation does not go far the little that life gives brings them satisfaction. Sumitra was a person of this nature. The king did not show her very great love. She did not mind it. She was neither the crowned queen nor the beloved young wife. Why should she be unhappy that he did not love her? How much love could a woman expect who came as the second wife to a prince who had reached middle age? Dasaratha no doubt did feel some affection for Sumitra. She was satisfied with so much. She bore the old man two sons. One of the sons grew up with one elder brother the other with another elder brother. Sumitra had therefore no need to take thought for their upbringing. What came to Rama was shared by Lakshmana what came to Bharata by Satrugna. As Kaikeyi was somewhat self-centred Sumitra was by force of circumstances thrown into the company of Kowsalya. Kaikeyi besides was not available for friendship as the king

sought her company Kowsalya and Sumitra thus became companions What came to Kowsalya it became natural for Sumitra to share Thus the life of Sumitra from the point of view either of her sons or of herself became a process of self-abnegation Bharata's uncle's house was as uncle's house to Satiughna The exile to which Rama was decreed embraced Lakshmana Sumitra became a sharer in the grief of Kowsalya Rama's mother begged her son not to go to the forest On the contrary it was Sumitra's duty to tell her son to go to the forest "You are made for living in exile" she said to him If Rama had to go to the forest it followed that Lakshmana had to go also That amounted to saying that he was born for exile Kowsalya could lament for her exiled son Sumitra could not think of lamenting for that one of her sons who was exiled Her part in life required her to address words of consolation to Kowsalya The words that Sumitra uttered on this occasion show how affectionate her nature was What a noble youth was Rama and how valiant! The sun would not be too hot to him, the wind would not blow harshly against him The moon would hold him in his rays as a father his child and caress him With him was Sita like his goddess and there was Lakshmana to serve him What could Rama lack? As the second of three wives not greatly beloved of the King, life in the palace where there was no excess of attention had brought home to Sumitra one great truth If there be friendship and love, the forest itself is as a city If they are not there, a city is no better than the wilderness Think of the

to tell as Vyadhya and Sumitra to Lakshmana by way of parting advice. She herself should at that hour have had the feeling that Vyadhya had become a wilderness. Though her own sorrow was no less than that of Kowsalya Sumitra was in a state of mind which permitted her to speak words of consolation to the elder queen. She succeeded in inducing calmness of mind in Kowsalya because the words that she uttered proceeded from genuine consideration and fellow feeling. Sumitra's behaviour on this occasion should have struck lookers on with wonder. It induced in her husband Dasaratha living on his death bed and listening to her words a feeling of deep respect. In the last words that he uttered he named Kaikeyi as the enemy of the race and Sumitra as a saint. Dasaratha's description was apt and correct. Sumitra is essentially saintly.

It is not necessary to deal with the other character of the story in this manner at this point. The story of Rama, Lakshmana and Sita grows further. It would be more appropriate to refer to later incidents in that story and then examine the characterization of the other important figures in the narrative. It may however be stated here that the second book of Valmiki's poem is full of incidents worthy of record. As stated earlier there is no poem in the world in which the life of man has been pictured on so spacious a canvas and in so detailed a manner. This appears from a study of even the four characters already examined.

## VII MORE OF THE STORY

IN the later books of the Ramayana we do not find depiction of human life on the same scale, but we get occasionally pictures with the same characteristics of thorough insight and accurate delineation. It is perhaps unnecessary to give an account of all such situations. Five of them, however, further develop the main characters of the story of the *Ayodhya Kanda*. These situations may, therefore, be studied in some detail.

### THE PURSUIT OF THE GOLDEN DEER

The first of them is the story of the abduction of Sita. Rama, Sita and Lakshmana should have taken about one year to reach the hill of Chitrakoota. Bharata may have seen them and returned in the same period. The exiles spent months and weeks and days in various hermitages further south and thus passed some ten years. After this they settled down in a hermitage of their own in what was known as Janasthana. This should have been on the confines of the jurisdiction of Lanka, if not within its boundary. In all likelihood this was the hinterland between the kingdoms of the north and Ravana's great empire of the south. Not far off from here was the hermitage of Maricha, friend and counsellor of Ravana. Somewhere close by should have been Ravana's northern outpost, under the command of his cousins Khara, Dushana and Thrisna. Ravana's sister Suipanakha seems to have spent some time here. Wandering in

the woods one day she happened to see the hermitage of Rama. Impelled perhaps by curiosity she approached it and saw the two brothers and Sita. The men seemed handsome beyond description in her eyes. So did Sita. Surpanakha thought she should have Rama for husband and made overtures to him. He laughed at her and told her that he had his woman and that if she wanted a man she had better think of Lakshmana. Surpanakha thought that Lakshmana would do just as well and asked him. He too laughed at her and told her that he was merely a servant and that if she was a sensible woman she ought to try and marry his brother who was the master. Surpanakha did not know what exactly to do but as Lakshmana refused on the ground that he was a servant and Rama on the ground that he had a wife and the latter's objection was one she could remove she threatened to injure Sita. As she rushed on his wife Rama taken by surprise shouted to Lakshmana to come and drive this woman away. Lakshmana ran up with some weapon and cut Surpanakha on her nose and ears. Surpanakha raised her voice in lamentation and fled and complained to her brothers. They came to Rama's hermitage and fought with him. Rama slew the men that came. They would seem to have been fourteen in number. The more generous imagination of later poetry furnishing the epic with impressive heroism made them out to be fourteen thousand. The story here gets a little mixed. Akampana a member of the outpost or Surpanakha or both carried the news of Rama's victory to Lanka. For some reason that is not clear Ravana thought that the best way of



punishing Rama was to bring away his wife. He, therefore, went to Maricha and much against that sage person's judgment persuaded him to assume the guise of a golden deer to tempt Sita. The ruse succeeded and Sita made Rama go out to catch the wonderful creature. Maricha led Rama on to a good distance and when Rama, unwilling to pursue the creature any further, shot at him, he cried out, Oh, Sita, Oh, Lakshmana, counterfeiting the voice of Rama, and dropped down dead. Sita and Lakshmana heard the cry. When the golden deer moved in front of their hermitage and attracted attention, Lakshmana had suggested that it might be some trick of Maricha's. The animal seemed so beautiful that it could not be an animal in fact. Maricha besides was notorious for skill in counterfeiting. Lakshmana had tried to dissuade Rama from pursuing the animal, but Sita was insistent. She had said "How beautiful is this creature, how shapely! If you bring it alive it will be an ornament to our apartment in the palace at Ayodhya. How Bharata and my mother-in-law will be delighted to see it! If you cannot bring it alive, bring it dead. Its skin will be so pretty." Rama himself was attracted by the animal. Sita's pleading also moved him. So he told Lakshmana "See, Lakshmana, Sita longs to have this animal. I agree that it is so beautiful that it seems not to be animal at all. I doubt if there is anything like it in the gardens of the *Gandharvas*. How then can there be such an animal on earth? Sita desires to have it. If it is an animal, well and good. If it is not an animal but some deceit of Maricha's I have to kill it and it is

my duty. Stay here and guard Sita. I shall pursue this animal and bring it alive or dead. Be alert and watch. It was after all this discussion that Rama had gone out. Remembering the discussion Rama on seeing the carcass of Maricha said to himself. As Lakshmana suspected this was some deceit of the enemy. This fellow called out Oh Sita Oh Lakshmana before dying. How it will have upset Sita! What should be Lakshmana's condition. He then proceeded to get some food for the day and there after turned towards the hermitage. Maricha's cry had in the *ishrama* the effect that he had intended and that Rama had feared. Sita immediately asked Lakshmana to go to Rama's help. Rama's distressed cry has made me as one dead. You should go to his assistance. He should have fallen into the hands of the *Rakshasas*. Run and help him. Lakshmana remembered his brother's instruction and did not go as bade by his sister in law. Sita fell into wrath and said. Lakshmana you are an enemy of your brother seeming to be a friend. That is why in such an hour you refuse to go to his help. You desire that evil should befall Rama in order that you may have me. That is why you do not run to his help. His distress is agreeable to you. You do not love your brother. To his sister in law weeping and talking in this fashion Lakshmana said in answer. There is no one among the races of earth and heaven who could vanquish your husband. Who can strive with Rama? He is not to be slain in a fight. Do not say such things. My mind does not allow me to leave you here when Rama is absent. Your husband will kill

that animal and return very soon. The voice that you have heard now is not his. It is of someone else counterfeiting his voice. My great brother has left you under my protection and gone. You are, therefore, a trust which I should not desert. As he slew Khara and his companions, the *Rakshasas* bear us a grudge. They have been crying in various ways in the woods. Do not, I pray you, be upset because of this cry." Sita censured Lakshmana in harsh words. "Oh, ignoble, pitiless, cruel, unworthy of your race. I fear that Rama's distress is a source of joy to you. That is why you are talking in this way. What wonder is there in a shaver in property simulating friendship and doing harm? Either from desire for me or in obedience to the words of Bharata, you have come alone with Rama who is alone and helpless. You are wicked. Lakshmana, your and Bharata's plans will not succeed. I, who have Rama for husband, will I desire another? I shall not live for a moment on this earth without Rama. I shall slay myself in your presence." These strange words of Sita did not unsettle Lakshmana. She spoke as mere woman. Lakshmana was self-controlled. To him Sita was not woman. She was Sita, she was sister-in-law, she was Rama's wife, divinity entitled to worship from the brother-in-law. He folded his hands to her and said "I am unable to answer these words of yours. To me you are an object of worship. You are deity. What you are saying, however, is nothing strange in a woman. This is the way of women all over the world. They do not see righteousness. They are frickle. They speak harshly and create friction. Your

words are piercing my ear like heated arrows I cannot stand them Let the spirits in these woods be witness to your unjust and cruel retort to my proper words You have suspected me I now do not mind what happens to you I shall go where Rama is May good befall you May the spirits of the wood guard you I am having inauspicious omens and do not know whether I shall see you when I return with Rama Sita again said to Lakshmana I will not live without Rama I shall enter the Godavari and give up my life or I shall drink poison or enter fire and die I shall not touch with my feet any man other than Rama She was talking inconsequently She beat herself on her stomach and wept like one gone mad Angered by her cruel words Lakshmana walked away into the forest

### THE ABDUCTION OF SITA

Ravana had been waiting for this close by and as Lakshmana passed out of view he entered the hermitage in the guise of an ascetic Seeing Sita he said to her Beautiful lady who are you? Are you the goddess of modesty or wealth or fame? Or are you one of the water nymphs or the Goddess of prosperity or Rathi wandering in the woods He described her beauty in detail and said This beauty of yours and your youth are maddening my mind This place is the abode of the cruel *Rakshasas* who deceive by disguises This is not a place for you How do you stay alone here without fear? Who are you? To whom do you belong and where have you come from and what is the reason for your being alone in

Dandakaranya, the home of *Rakshasas*?" Sita did not feel greatly inclined to speak to Ravana, but was afraid that if she did not attend to him he might utter curses. So she told him in slow words all her story and then asked him "What, Sir, is your name? Of what race and sept are you? Tell me true, and why are you going about in this deep forest all by yourself?" Ravana in reply told her who he was in truth "I am that Ravana," he said, "on whose account the worlds of the Gods and *Rakshasas* and the *Nagas* are all in fear. I am the king of the *Rakshasas*. After seeing your beauty of golden hue, I have felt no desire or inclination towards any of my women. I have a host of handsome wives whom I have got from here and there, selecting them. Come and be the chief of them and be my foremost queen. Lanka, set in the middle of the sea, is my capital. You will sport in the woods there with me and will not then think of this life you are leading here. Be my wife and be served by five thousand servant-maids richly adorned." Sita defied him. "My heart is fixed in my husband Rama who is firm as the hills and splendid as Mahendra and imperturbable as the ocean. Mighty of arm, broad-chested, he is a lion among men, valiant as a lion, powerful as a lion. You are a jackal desiring the company of a lioness. You cannot touch the halo of the sun. No more can you touch me. You, who desire to own Rama's beloved wife are an unfortunate creature who sees trees bearing gold." Sita spoke words of courage but in her heart there was fear. Even if there was no fear there, the body was woman's. Saying these courageous words to

Ravana she was trembling. Kavana knit his brows and spoke cruelly. I am brother to Vasharavana. The Gods and *Candharas* and *Pisachas* the tribe of snake and birds run from fear of me. The wind holds from blowing where I stand and the sun makes his rays cool for my sake. Where I stand the trees dare not move their leaves the flow of water in the rivers becomes tardy. Come to Lanka and be happy and you will not even think of Rama a mere man whose days are soon over. What can you get from Rama in exile from king ship. Sita said in reply.

You call your self brother to Vasharavana who receive worship from all beings. How then have you started to commit impropriety. The *Rakshasas* who own you a person with his senses uncontrolled and his mind so evil as king are sure to be destroyed completely. You may steal Sita queen of Indra and live. You cannot steal me and live. Kavana scoffed at her. You are silly and are talking silly words. You have not heard of my courage and valour. He then threw off his disguise and appearing in his own shape told her to give up her obstinacy and accept him and caught hold of her. His chariot came. He took Sita on his hip and sat in the chariot. It flew up. Sita cried out in agony.

Oh Lakshmana mighty armed ever serving your brother's wishes this *Rakshasa* is carrying me away and you do not know. Rama you gave up position pleasure and wealth for the sake of righteousness and do not know how I am being taken away unrighteously. Thus Ravana is a criminal and you are not punishing him. I fear that you are not the

punisher of the evil-minded Very well, evil deeds do not show their fruit immediately but that fruit will come in time Let Kaikeyi feel happy now All flowering *Kaṁkara*s of Janasthana, I beg you to tell Rama quickly, Ravana carried away Sita I bow in reverence to you Malyavanta, and to you Godavari, full of swan and other water-birds, and beg you, pray tell Rama of this without delay I fold my hands in reverence to all the deities of the various trees in this wood Pray tell Rama of this I seek the refuge of all the beings in this place whether bird or beast, and beg you to tell Rama that Ravana took me away without my consent Rama will rescue me" Sita at that moment saw Jatayu and told him "Jatayu, this *Rakshasa* is taking me away as though I were ownerless See This creature of the night is cruel You cannot fight with him Tell Rama that he took me Tell Lakshmana all that has occurred without omitting any detail" Jatayu tried to stop Ravana, but did not succeed Ravana took Sita away to Lanka

#### SITA IN RAVANA'S PLEASURE GARDEN

When they had reached Lanka, Ravana showed Sita all his wealth Imagining that she should have lost her heart to it he said "There is not another in the world, valiant as I It is not possible for any person to take you out of my hands Be my queen and enjoy all this magnificence" And he expressed his love and told her "Your face, beautiful like the lotus, is not looking so because you are crying" Sita covered her face with the corner of her cloth and wept bitterly Ravana thought that she was

willing but was hesitating from shyness. Enough of this modesty, he said. I touch your feet with my head. Be gracious. I am your servant or your slave. Ravana never bent his head to any woman. He thought that she should yield to these words. Sita put a bit of straw between her and him and said in reply. King Dasaratha was firm as a bridge for righteousness. Rama is his son. He is famous in the three worlds as a righteous soul. That mighty armed and large eyed man is my God, my husband. That son of the Ikshvakus has the front of a lion. He is radiant. His brother Lakshmana and he will take your life. If you had come to take me when they were present your fate would have been the fate of Khara. You cannot touch me. When this body is unconscious you may tie it up, you may eat it. It is not in my power to protect this body or this life. But my mind will not submit to you. Ravana said. I shall wait for one year. If within that time you do not agree, my people will cut you into a hundred pieces. He then placed a guard over Sita and kept her in the pleasure garden of his palace.

Hanuman came to Lanka in search of Sita and wandering all over Ravana's palace noticed Mandodari lying beside Ravana. In the first moment he thought that that was Sita but immediately corrected himself and went forward. Finally he saw Sita in the garden in the midst of her guard, unhappy, emaciated and sighing in grief. Even then her beauty seemed wonderful. Hanuman said to himself. Strong minded is Rama to have lost this wife and yet remain alive. It was now morning and Ravana came up to repeat



his request to Sita. At his approach Sita shivered as does a plantain tree in the wind. She sat, covering all her person, and wept. Ravana said to her, "You see me and cover yourself. You are handsome in every limb. I desire you. It is the way of *Rakshasas* to take and own others' women. Yet I shall not touch you without your desiring me. Be not afraid. Love me. This fasting and this poor clothing, this un-combed hair and sleeping on the ground, are without occasion. Be mine and use flower and sandal, incense, clothing and jewellery, drink, food and bed, dancing and singing. You are the crown of womanly beauty. You ought not to stay as you are. Wear ornaments. Your youth has come to you in beauty. It will disappear. It is as the waters of a swift stream, once it flows away, it will not return. There is no woman of beauty like yours. The creator of beautiful forms seems to have made you and stopped. Look on whatever part of your body I may, there my eye is held prisoner. Be my queen. Give up this infatuation for Rama. Become my first wife and rule over the handsome ladies whom I have brought from all over the world. All my wealth I shall deliver to you. I shall conquer all the earth and make a gift of it to Janaka. What will you do with Rama who wears sack-cloth like a beggar and lives in exile in the wilderness? He may be alive or dead. In no manner can he be my equal." Sita said to him, "Turn your mind away from me and keep it on your own women. What you are asking is not proper. Nor is it proper for me, born in a noble lineage and joining another noble one, to agree." She said again, "I am another's wife

I am not your wife. See the way of good people and do as they do. Just as you guard your wives for yourself, so ought you to guard other wives for them. There are no decent people here or they are here and you are not following them. Somehow your mind has abandoned the right way and gone ugly. You are boasting of your great wealth. The one crime that you have committed will destroy all that wealth presently. How can I, wife of Rama, king of the earth, enter the enclosure of another's arms? If you desire to continue living, be for Rama's friendship. You cannot stand Rama's wrath. You boast about your courage. What courage is that of the poltroon who came to the hermitage when both the brothers were absent and told me. Rama's valour, you say, is not equal to yours. The truth is far otherwise. I shall not say that you cannot stand in the presence of Rama. You cannot even bear the smell of Rama, and Lakshmana as a dog cannot bear the smell of a tiger. Ravana fell into wrath. As I am saying soft words you are saying harsh ones. For every one of the seven words death were the proper punishment. Yet I am patient for where there is love there is pity. Two months more the time I have given you runs. After that you must come into my bed. If you refuse you will be slain. Sita defied him again and Ravana became further incensed and directing the women of the guard to correct her, he returned to the palace. The seven women of the guard talked at great length to Sita, telling her that Rama was good for nothing, that Ravana was so great that Sita should consider herself fortunate to become the wife of so

mighty a person. Sita rebuked them and, when they threatened her, wept helplessly. 'It is true,' she said to herself, "that neither man nor woman can die before the destined hour. That is why I am alive even after separation from Rama and this cruelty from *Rakshasa* women. Happy are they who see my master with eyes like the petals of a lotus and gait like that of a lion, my prince who remembers service and is sweet of speech. I cannot live without him, I shall give up life." She feared too whether as he had stolen and brought her, Ravana had killed Rama and Lakshmana. 'Fortunate in truth are the great-souled ascetics who have no desire. They know not pleasant and unpleasant. With their selves under their control they are happy.' At this stage, Thiriyata, one of the women of the guard, told her of a dream she had had and assured her of coming good.

### THE MESSAGE OF HANUMAN

Hanuman was greatly overcome to see Sita in this plight. He wished to make her aware of himself and spoke the story of Rama in soft words from the branch of the tree under which Sita was sitting. Surprised to hear these words and wondering who might be saying them, Sita lifted her head and saw a monkey shape. That a monkey should tell the story of Rama seemed to the lady to be a dream. By this time Hanuman had descended from the tree. Standing before Sita and folding his hands, he said to her "Lady, who are you? You look as if you were one from among the Gods. It seems to me you are the princess Sita, whom Ravana abducted from Janasthana

Pray assure me Sita told him her story Hanuman said Lady I am a messenger come to you with news from Rama Rama is well He is wishing you well Lakshmana salutes you Sita was delighted and said to herself These words of the people I now know are right It may be after a hundred years but to him who is alive happiness does come As Sita was thinking thus to herself Hanuman approached her The lady felt some misgiving Could this be Ravana coming in the guise of a monkey? He who came in one form that day might have come in another to day It seems to me however that it cannot be so For looking at you I feel friendly If indeed you are a messenger come from Rama may you prosper I am asking you for I wish to hear concerning Rama Describe him to me Again she felt a doubt that all this might be mere dream and said to herself Even if it is only a dream it is good For I am seeing in it a messenger sent by Rama Ah me If I might have sight in a dream why have I not seen Rama and Lakshmana? Even the dream is heartless to me Yet I think this is not a dream Hanuman understood why Sita asked him to describe Rama and spoke to her of Rama and Lakshmana and told her how Sugriva had become their friend He added Rama is thinking of you every moment It is fortunate you are alive You will soon see Rama with Lakshmana and Sugriva in the midst of a crore of *Vanaras* I am minister to Sugriva Give up your doubt and believe me Sita to get over some doubt that was still lingering in her mind asked him How did you meet Rama and Lakshmana?

How do they look?" Hanuman described them and told her how he had met them and gave her finally a ring that Rama had sent with him as a token. Seeing her husband's ring Sita rejoiced as if she had joined him again. She extolled Hanuman for having brought it to her and said "Is Rama well? He must be feeling the grief of separation from me deeply. Will he come soon and rescue me? Will Bharata who is greatly devoted to Rama send an army, a crore strong for freeing me? Will Sugriva, king of all *Vanas* come here surrounded by his mighty warriors? Will valiant Lakshmana, delight of Sumitra, vanquish the *Rakshasas* with his shower of arrows? Why have they not come yet?" As Sita poured out the wish of her heart in these many words, Hanuman said to her "Lady, Rama does not know that you are here. That is why he has not come to take you. As soon as I take news of you to him, he will start for this place. He will come and end the race of the *Rakshasas* of Lanka. Rama is in deep grief as you are not near. He knows no peace of mind. Rama does not eat a meal, he does not drink sweet stuff. He relishes not even the daintiest food. Steeped in thought of you, he is unaware of flea and mosquito and of lizard or other creatures moving on his body. In his sleep he does not rest. As he leaves his bed he calls your name. When he sees fruit or flower or other beautiful thing he cries again and again, oh, my beloved, oh, my beloved. He talks of you and grieves for you every moment. Rama is under a vow to find you again and is engaged in the enterprise." Sita said in reply "These words

of yours are to me like an elixir mixed with poison  
That Rama is loving me gives me joy That he is  
in grief detracts from that joy Man cannot trans-  
gress his destiny When alas will Rama pass this time  
of sorrow slay the *Rakshasas* slay Ravana lay  
Lanka in ruins and see me? Ask him to make haste  
I shall be alive only till this year is over It is not  
likely that Ravana will surrender me to Rama  
Vibhishana's daughter told me this Rama will rescue  
me He has the enthusiasm and valour He has pity  
He remembers So Sita spoke Hanuman spoke  
words of encouragement to her Immediately he  
receives word from me Rama will start with his army  
this way Or lady I shall relieve you from this  
sorrow myself immediately Sit on my back and I shall  
convey you across the sea I shall deliver you to  
Rama as the God of fire delivers an oblation to the  
Lord of the Gods You will thus see Rama and  
Lakshmana immediately You will move in the sky  
like one talking to the sun and the moon and  
join Rama Hearing this astounding proposal of  
Hanuman Sita said Hanuman the way is far Is it  
possible for you to carry me? Hanuman thought to  
himself The lady does not know my power Let  
her see the shape I can assume at will and appeared  
in his larger form Sita looked at him and said  
Brother your spirit and power are known to me  
What person who is common would have dared to  
come to this place? It is not impossible for you to  
take me to where Rama is But that would be im-  
proper I may lose consciousness with the speed of  
your flight across the sky and drop into the ocean

If I do not do that, a doubt may be felt about your carrying a woman. The *Rakshasas* will fight with you. Whether we shall win or lose, we cannot say. Besides, even if you do vanquish the *Rakshasas*, Rama would thus lose the fame that should come to him by punishing them. More than all this, I do not touch the body of any man other than Rama. It is true that I touched Ravana's body. But then I was powerless. I could not help myself. The course that becomes Rama is coming here, slaying Ravana with his relatives and taking me back." Hanuman said, "Lady, what you say is proper. It is in accord with woman's nature and lady-like refinement. I shall submit all this to Rama. I offered to take you but did so in a spirit of love and devotion to my master and for no other reason. As you will not go with me, pray, give me something by which Rama will recognise you." Sita gave Hanuman the jewel of her confide and said, "Tell Rama that I shall be alive for just two months more. Tell Lakshmana that I made enquiries of him. When he is near, Rama does not miss his father. Give this jewel into Rama's hands and again tell Rama and Lakshmana that I enquired after their welfare. Tell Sugriva and his ministers that I asked about them. You should tell Rama whatever may be necessary to make him come and rescue me and take me." On the ground that they were friends of Rama, Sugriva and his ministers, though known to Sita only through Hanuman's words, came into the circle of courteous enquiry. To Sita's statement that it was his responsibility to make Rama rescue her, Hanuman again gave the assurance that Rama would come. As he got ready

to return Sita looked on the messenger again and again and said Brother stay here to day and to morrow Let there be a slight intermission in the sorrow of this unfortunate woman I have doubts about your coming again once you go and about my being alive How will Rama cross with an army the great sea impossible to cross? Yet it is your business to make him come here Hanuman said

Lady Sugriva the Lord of *Vanaras* and the *Riksha* hordes has resolved on this enterprise His *Vanara* heroes are mighty and full of valour There are persons equal to me and greater there There is not one in Sugriva's presence smaller than I If I have come here what difficulty can others feel? Rama will arrive in Lanka with our armies and slay Ravana and take you and return to Ayodhya Who is there greater than Rama who is there equal to Lakshmana? If they combine it is like wind and fire combining You will not stay here long There will be no delay in your dear one coming Pray hold on until I have seen him

### THE ORDEAL OF FIRE

The next situation of similar importance in Sita's life is that in which after the victory against Ravana Rama openly insulted her When Ravana's obsequies were over Vibhishana was crowned king Rama then said to Hanuman Hanuman go into Lanka with the permission of Vibhishana now king Go to Ravana's palace and communicate to Sita the glad news of this victory Tell her I am well with Sugriva and Lakshmana and that I slew Ravana and bring



her reply to me" We are unable to imagine what various replies Rama thought possible Sita had been waiting for the moment of his coming and releasing her This Rama knew Yet it became necessary for him to send word of victory to Sita and get a reply from her Hanuman went to Sita in obedience to his master's command and conveyed the message to her "Lanka now belongs to Vibhishana You can be in peace of mind as in your own house Vibhishana will come presently for audience of you" Sita in sudden efflux of joy was unable to say anything in reply Hanuman said "Lady, what are you thinking? Why do you not answer me?" Sita said "I was beside myself with joy at the happy news of my husband's victory and could not utter a word I do not know what to say in reply to you who have brought such news" Hanuman said "Lady, what you have said is equivalent in my mind to all the guerdon you can give" Said Sita "Your speech is beautiful and sweet You are the only one who can speak so Strength, prowess, learning, goodness, enterprise, competence, forgiveness and courage, these and other good qualities shine in you" "Lady," said Hanuman, "these *Rakshasa* women have given you much trouble I shall punish them" Sita prevented him doing the women of her guard any harm "They obeyed the orders of their master Would any one be angry with them? My destiny was bad and I had done harm previously Therefore all this trouble came to me To guilty persons as also to innocent ones, the noble of heart should show only kindness There is no one who has not done wrong" "Lady," said

Hanuman thus becomes you. Give me the reply to Rama's message and I shall go to him. Sita said

I wish to see my husband. Hanuman told her that she would see him and then went to Rama to communicate Sita's wish to him. Rama's eyes filled with tears and he lost himself in thought. He heaved a deep sigh and looking at the ground told Vibhishana

Bring the lady here after she has had a bath and finished her toilet. Vibhishana went and told Sita of this. Sita told him that she wanted to see her husband as he was. It is proper, submitted Vibhishana, that you should do as the King, your husband desires. Sita then agreed. The ladies of Vibhishana's palace then attended on her and Sita got ready to leave. Vibhishana seated her in a palanquin and with a troop of women of the guard brought her to Rama and told him that the lady had come. The conduct of his wife who had stayed long in the palace of Rama and now come to him produced joy, anger and humiliation in Rama's mind and he told Vibhishana to bring Sita near. By Vibhishana's command his servants were driving the crowd that had gathered round to a distance. This caused commotion. Rama saw this and was upset and looking at Vibhishana in vexation said, Why are you regardless of me giving trouble to these people? Stop this arrangement of yours. All these are my people. Women do not get protection by walls and veils and houses nor by this royal treatment. Their conduct should be women's protection. There is besides no harm in others seeing women in sorrow and battle and other such occasions. So Sita may

now appear before people Moreover as I myself am here there is absolutely no objection to her coming Bring Sita now Let her see me with my friends" Vibhishana was unable to understand the import of these words Lakshmana, Sugriva and Hanuman inferred that Rama did not want Sita, and were unhappy Sita walked behind Vibhishana and reached the presence of Rama, shrinking into herself from shame Shy because of the crowd around, and covering her face with her cloth and in tears, she uttered one word of address to Rama and was unable to say more Rama spoke to her "Lady, I have vanquished my foe and released you I have now wiped out what disgrace there was of mine and have established my prowess This is enough reward for my trouble, as also for all that Hanuman did and all the hardship through which Sugriva and his army have passed" Hearing this elaborate oration, Sita's eyes filled with tears The tears made Rama angrier still and he went on "I did not do all this on your account I did it in order that my name be not fouled When there is doubt about your conduct it hurts my eye to look on you Go where you like You have come down from the lap of Ravana You have been looked on by his foul eyes How shall I receive you again? I have no desire for you You can go just where you like Stay with Vibhishana, Sugriva or Bharata, wherever you feel inclined You are a great beauty Seeing you for a year in his palace, it is not likely that Ravana left you untouched" Hearing these cruel words of Rama, Sita was greatly grieved and ashamed and felt as if she would shrink

into her eld. Weeping she said to Rama. You are a noble man. Why are you addressing to me as one common person my to another these harsh words which pierce the ear and do not become us. I am not that which you think of me. I swear thus by my conduct. Take my word. You are thinking suspiciously of all women because of the conduct of some women. If you know me at all do not have such doubts. That a stranger touched my body was an occurrence beyond my control. There was no desire in my mind in the case. The fault was not in me but in my fortunes. What is within my power is my mind. That has always been yours. If the body is not in one's power in the same way what shall I do? You have grown with me and moved with me from early years. You should therefore have understood my nature. If you have not understood I am indeed unfortunate. If you had such doubts of me why should you have sent Hanuman here? You could have abandoned me then alone. Then alone I would have ended my life. You would not have had to take all this unnecessary trouble yourself nor given all this unnecessary trouble to our friends. Mighty are you among men and yet you have taken the path of anger. Man thinks of women but lightly. You are virtuous yet you do not value virtue in me. The fact that this hand is the same girl's hand which you held in your youth has not been sufficient guarantee to you. You have cast behind you all considerations of my devotion and purity. Having said this in a voice thick with emotion Sita turned to Lakshmana who grieved and humiliated was standing near and

said to him 'Soumitra, make me a pyre. That is the only remedy for this grief of mine. I do not wish to live in the pain of false slander. I have been cast off in a crowd by a husband who does not love me. There is no other course open to me. I shall enter the fire.' Lakshmana looked at Rama's face and gathered from his manner that Sita's entering the fire had Rama's approval. He made up a pyre. Sita then went round Rama slowly and with bent head walked to the fire and, doing reverence to the Brahmins and Gods and with folded hands said 'Even as my mind at no time swerved from Rama, so may this fire which purifies protect me and be witness. As I whom Rama considers defiled have been pure in conduct, so may the fire which purifies save me and be witness. As in thought, word or deed I have never failed in faith to Rama, so may the fire guard me. So also may the sun and the wind, the four quarters and the moon, day and night, morning and evening, the earth and the other principles which know that my conduct has been good save me!' With these words Sita went round the fire and entered the flames. Those who looked on trembled from fear. All the women present wept to see Sita enter the fire like a sacred oblation. The Gods and *Gandharvas*, the *Danavas* *Vanaras* and *Rakshasas* cried out at the sight. The fire did not hurt Sita. She came out from the ordeal and joined Rama. Rama said "I know that Sita is undefiled but she stayed in Ravana's inner apartments for a long time. If I took her again without this trial good people might have said. Rama was moved by desire, he was infatuated. So for convincing the

world I was silent when Sita entered the fire. She is guarded by her own self-respect. Just as the car cannot pass beyond its horse so was it impossible for Ravana to misconduct himself with her. He then received her and, finding that he had to leave immediately for Ayodhya, hurried and got the aerial car of Ravana's palace and sat in it with Sita in his lap and started on the journey. The poet in this context describes Sita as shy. A little earlier Rama had uttered improper words to her and blamed her. Now he made her happy by showing exceeding great love. Valmiki concludes this story with this picture of Sita shy of sitting on Rama's lap in the presence of all people and smiling.

## VIII THE OTHER CHARACTERS

### RAMA

We may now study the main character appearing in this story. The most important of them is Rama. Valmiki seems to have found in Rama his ideal of manhood. Everyone in the poem praises Rama. When Viswamitra came to Dasaratha and asked for Rama's assistance to put down those who were obstructing the sacrifices which he was performing, Rama was still young but his greatness in archery was well known all over the country. What an army could not do Rama it was believed would be able to do all by himself. When Dasaratha

expressed doubts on account of his son's youth, Viswamitra said to him "I know Rama's worth Vasishtha knows and so do the sages assembled here" To the father who had brought up Rama as a child the son's achievement, naturally, seemed less certain than his youth In association with Viswamitra, Rama completed his education as a soldier He went with Viswamitra to Janaka's Mithila, bent without any effort the bow which had foiled the attempt of many mighty men previously and by that feat won Sita. His other good qualities were as well known as his strength and courage Rama's goodness is described in over thirty verses at one point When Dasaratha proposed that Rama should become Yuvaraja and relieve him of administration the people agreed readily While walking in the righteous path himself, Rama seems to have conducted himself towards others with consideration and patience Though a king's son he was not proud He would not wait to be spoken to but would himself speak to people He would speak softly and speak smiling When any one prospered he delighted as a father might Earth saw his great qualities, the people said, and desired this man who resembled God for her lord Kaikeyi who drove Rama to exile had nothing against him She praised him warmly Rama, it is stated treated with the respect which he showed to his own mother Kowsalya all women on whom the king had looked even once Dasaratha's women praised him for this quality Bharata, Lakshmana and Sumantra refer to Rama in words of great tenderness and regard for his nobility Maricha himself, before starting on his fateful journey

to help in the abduction of Sita spoke highly of Rama in remonstrance with Ravana. The story of Rama's exile seems to have been known all over the country as indeed it might as over ten years had elapsed since the occurrence. Many thought that Rama was driven out. That is how Ravana refers to the exile. Men like Maricha knew that Rama had not been driven out but had come away impelled by a sense of honour and of duty to his father to carry out what ever promise that father made. Rama greatly respected his father and loved him tenderly. He greatly respected his mother and pitied her position. He should have seen that his mother's life was made unhappy through Kaikeyi. Yet he conducted himself to the step mother with affection and regard. It looks as if he realised that conflict of this kind is inevitable in life and was therefore patient with people who had each to do what seemed best to him or her in the circumstances of their life. When Dasaratha told Rama that he should become Yuvaraja Rama was willing. When he understood that this was not to be he was equally willing. All the hesitation that Dasaratha felt in regard to Rama's exile was on his own account and not in the fear that Rama might not agree. When his step mother told him that he should go to the forest Rama told her that he was no lover of wealth that he was rather something of a sage. He knew his goal and believed in himself. Rama was a man of firm resolve. He made up his mind that in spite of the hardship it meant he had to go to exile and thereafter refused to move from his resolve whatever friends and elders said. When others



desired to share the hardship of exile with him he tried to dissuade them. In arguing with Kowsalya he urged various reasons to make her stay in Ayodhya. He urged various other reasons in trying to dissuade Lakshmana and Sita from following him. The reasons he urged when Sumantia made such a request were again different. Thus he spoke to each in the manner most suitable to that person and the words that would appeal. He made light of the hardship that fell to his lot to save others from too much grief. He described his coming exile as a period of sport in the forest. Rama loved his city deeply. He loved to walk about in the gardens of Ayodhya, to bathe in the waters of Sarayu, and hunt in the woods by the margin of the river. When he had left all this pleasure and lived in the forest, he remembered the joy of life in Ayodhya and wondered with his brother when again he could have it. Yet he would not brook an unkind thought of the step-mother who had deprived him of that life. When Lakshmana spoke unkindly of Kaikeyi he told him not to speak of the step-mother in words of offence, but to speak instead kind words of the loving Bhairata. "It pleases me more," he said. "Speak good words, if possible, and get all the joy you can. If it is not possible to speak good words, speak not and be silent." That seems to have been Rama's rule. Not speaking, however, did not mean not knowing who had been kind and who unkind. He did not expect in men insensitiveness as in a log. Men should feel but they should endure. Rama knew for himself the right course in life and he never flinched from following it. He knew also what the right course for others

was He however never prescribed to others the course they should follow demanding that they should suffer Only in the case of his mother Kowsalya he insisted that she should stay in Ayodhya with the King and not follow him into exile That was because what he wished to do on his account was in his view unrighteous It was not merely improper but wrong Such conduct in Kowsalya would have made manifest to the world that the household of Dasaratha had broken up It would have brought a bad name to Rama's mother and it would amount to his having agreed that his mother should endure the sufferings of an exile on his account In the case of Sita Rama knew that duty required her to follow him He however did not tell her that that was her duty Not merely did he not tell her this When she said that she would follow him he made clear to her how difficult that course of conduct would be When however he found that she was resolved on following him he agreed to her doing so as duty bade her Janaka in handing Sita over to Rama had said This my daughter Sita is your companion in *dharma* In agreeing to her accompanying him to the forest Rama told her Be my companion in *dharma* Husband and wife had lived together till that day in much happiness That was the pleasant part of the companionship in *dharma* Following the husband to exile would be observance of the hard ship part of the same *dharma* What Sita had done till then was a part of her duty Yet by only so much no one could fulfil all wifely duty The all of it could be said to have been fulfilled only by

observing the harder part Sita completed the observance of the law of her life by following Rama to the forest. This pleased Rama. Her company took away from exile the greater part of its pain. When it was settled that she should go with him Rama told Sita that she made him happy. When Kowsalya would have made his exile easy by going with him but leaving the path of her *dharma*, Rama denied her permission, when Sita proposed to make his life easier by fulfilling her *dharma* he agreed. The essential thing to strive for is righteousness. If in realising righteousness one gets pleasure he might enjoy it. But no one should look for enjoyment abandoning righteousness. If in any circumstance it becomes necessary to consider what path one should follow, this is the question to ask: which way does righteousness indicate? If two courses seem, equally, courses of righteousness, one should ask "What is the right course for me?" rather than "What is the right course for the other person?" As one should decide on the hard course for oneself one should leave the other person to decide on the hard course for himself. In deciding what course is right for another person, one should beware of being led by one's own inclination to prescribe the more difficult of two courses. The decision that she should follow Rama, though this meant pain and suffering, was a resolution that Sita had to take. For Rama to say that she should accompany him would have been selfishness in him. In explaining his attitude to Sita later, Rama made this clear. The poet describes Rama as valiant for truth, as a battler for truth. He had to fight with everyone to

prevent his father's promise proving false with his mother Kowsalya with his brother Lakshmana with that father himself with Jabali with Vasishtha and with Bharata. Rama respected his elders and was a courteous man. Yet when he was told to leave the path which he thought right he disobeyed even his elders. When in his exile in the forests of the south the sages who dwelt there asked him for protection from the *Rakshasas* he promised it to them. Rama had the power of understanding people quickly. As soon as he saw Hanuman he recognised him as a great soul. As soon as he saw Sugriva he knew that whatever his faults he was not overbearing or wicked. That was how he agreed to slay Vali to make Sugriva king. When on the march to Lanka Vibhishana brother of Ravana offered to join him Rama agreed without hesitation. When Sugriva and other cautioned him against accepting a brother of the enemy without examination Rama said: A person has merely to say that he is mine once and I give him from all that exists. This is my vow. Rama had no doubt whatever that he would vanquish Ravana. Immediately Vibhishana took refuge with him he had him crowned king of Lanka. Rama's prowess in battle became manifest even in boyhood. It reached its fulfilment when he slew Ravana who terrorised the world. Side by side with this prowess Rama had great compassion for all life. When he left Avadhya and came to the Ganges Guha asked him how he could be of service. Rama told him in reply that if he could give some grass for the horses of his chariot he would feel that he had received all necessary courtesy and

he asked Sumantra to look after the horses properly. It had become a habit with Rama to conduct himself as senior Bharata, Lakshmana and Satrugna were barely a day or two younger than he. But in his treatment of them Rama acted as if they were years younger. They too treated him with the respect due to an elder many years their senior. Rama, in spite of this fact, acted when Bharata was king as if Bharata was senior and he an agent of his. When he yielded protection to the sages of Dandakaranya and to Sugriva, he acted as a servant of Bharata, as a representative of the king. This political sense came naturally to Rama, even as his sense of righteousness. Even in state-craft of the present day there is no idea more advanced than this. Rama's love for those who became his friends was immense. As he grieved for Sita and Lakshmana, even so he grieved for Sugriva. When he had slain Ravana he did not enter Lanka. One reason for this was that he should not enter a town until the period of exile was over. Another was that Bharata was waiting and that he should not delay his return to Ayodhya. When the fourteen years were over and he returned to Ayodhya Rama accepted kingship in the same way as he had accepted exile. He was not unhappy in the hermitage nor overjoyed in a palace. Kingship is not a bundle of pleasures. Rama knew this. He ruled Ayodhya as king in such a way that his people thought him God. To speak at sufficient length of Rama's qualities would be to summarise the Ramayana again. Valmiki's object was to picture a character essentially noble. The poet succeeded in doing this. Rama

is even to day one of the great characters in world literature

### THE VALI EPISODE

Two incidents in this noble character are some times referred to as defects. One is Rama's slaying Vali. The other is his having allowed Sita to enter the fire though he knew her to be pure. A third defect is sometimes indicated in that he drove Sita to exile later merely because some people referred dis respectfully to her. This last incident need not be discussed here. It occurs in the seventh book of the Ramayana and it has been stated earlier that this book is not Valmiki's work and the record is spurious. The other two incidents however require examination. The main objection taken in regard to the first of these incidents is that Rama accepted Sugriva's story without investigation and took his side as against Vali. The second objection is that having taken sides in this manner he shot Vali from cover. These objections seem to have been felt long ago. The poet refers to these objections and has made his characters justify Rama's conduct. It would appear as if the justification did not convince people. Persons of an orthodox way of thinking came to say that Rama was God and that what he did was right. The impropriety of the action however remained a burden on their mind. A later generation made Vali into a huntsman and got Krishna who was a later incarnation of Rama killed by him. What Rama did to Vali was thus expiated by Krishna diving from the arrow of a huntsman. Those who are sure of the identity

of these persons may feel satisfied that the later occurrence was retribution for the earlier one. The idea underlying this explanation that even an incarnation of God has to suffer punishment for doing wrong is truly sublime, though the question would yet remain why God should do anything wrong. While orthodoxy moves in this circle, modern criticism has revived the objections raised and answered by Valmiki. It says that Rama ought not to have taken sides with Sugriva without enquiry as to Vali's point of view. Even if he decided to do so he should have invited Vali to a fight and slain him. This is what we say, and we say it from the point of view of the superior state-craft and refined prowess of modern times. Whether state-craft and prowess to-day are superior and refined as compared with the state-craft and prowess of Rama's day it is unnecessary to discuss here. But even to-day state-craft for its own purposes takes sides with one of two contending parties without too closely examining whether that side is the right one or not. Nor does valour to-day always invite the enemy to a duel and slay him only after giving him a chance to slay it. Rama took sides with Sugriva who had been driven from his kingdom and was living in the wilderness. State-craft to-day takes help from such people. Who can say whether Vali, sitting on his throne, would have agreed to help Rama the exile? But we ought not to examine the conduct of Rama either from the orthodox point of view as that of God or the modern point of view as that of a modern hero. We have to look at the incident as it appeared to Rama and Lakshmana and Vali and

Sugriva When Vali reproached him for having helped Sugriva without ascertaining who was in the right Rama told him You drove your brother into the wilderness You kept his wife and found happiness You deserve punishment The kings of the line of Ikshvaku have dominion over the world I inflicted this chastisement on you on behalf of Bharata If you deserved chastisement the manner of administering it was left to me This is not a question of valour Valmiki says that the reply convinced Vali Whether this was the case we have no other means of knowing The answer however indicates the attitude of Rama He conceived his line as having empire over all this country That was how he promised help to the sages immediately they asked for it The person that first brought news of Sugriva to Rama was Hanuman Hanuman was very wise By his manner Rama saw that he was worthy of belief From what Hanuman had said Rama felt convinced that Vali had been unjust to Sugriva To Rama who had come away to the wilderness in order that a younger brother might be king Vali who had driven a younger brother to the wilderness in order to be king seemed a mean and cruel creature Vali had besides taken Sugriva's wife into his arms This seemed unpardonable to Rama As he felt convinced that Vali had done wrong he had no hesitation in deciding to chastise him As for the manner of chastisement itself one would not suppose that he felt it a thing for much thought To meet a wild creature like Vali who had driven a brother into exile and was keeping that brother's wife there was no need to think



over procedure Those who know how civilised people deal with uncivilised ones will not consider this conduct in Rama as either unusual or highly improper Or if they do say that it is improper, they would be saying so from not realising the situation in which Rama and persons like him act It is wrong to criticise any one's conduct in this manner The correct thing is to ask whether, at the time and place and in those circumstances, Rama behaved dishonestly To some people at least it should appear that Rama's conduct in the circumstances in which he was placed was reasonable enough Those who will not agree should say either that he did what he knew to be unrighteous or that he proceeded without sufficiently considering what was right It is not likely that any one will suggest that Rama did what he knew to be unrighteous The utmost that can be said would be that there is something lacking in the conception of right by which he was guided This would mean that the righteous and valiant Rama, in his sorrow for a lost wife and the agitation of anxiety for her, took pity on Sugriva who was similarly situated, and, incensed against Vali who had injured his friend, slew him from cover not pausing to doubt the correctness of that course This undoubtedly would detract from Rama's character But considering how good he was, the detraction cannot be much If we say that Rama was God, the question remains why he did wrong Take him as a man and the error seems small Rama was as good as God, but he was man To those who see the numerous virtues practised in his life it seems

were carping to dwell on the error of his conduct in this context

### THE EPISODE OF SITA'S ORDEAL

The incident of the ordeal by fire through which Sita had to pass has so much to be viewed with reference to the occasion and the circumstances. Rama had foreseen the risks of life in the forest and had tried to dissuade Sita from accompanying him. She had however insisted on being with him. Rama lived this and many years of the period of exile fled by as in port. A sense of his duty as a member of the line of Ikshvaku responsible for the welfare of the sages in Dandak brought Rama into conflict with the outpost of Ravana. Maricha came in the guise of a deer. Suspecting that it might be deceit but desirous of satisfying Sita, Rama had followed the animal. He asked Lakshmana to guard Sita. A little while later the cry Lakshmana, Sita was heard in a voice like the voice of Rama. Rama had never before cried in this manner. Shortly before this occurrence Rama by the might of his two arms had vanquished Khari and Dushana and Thirisi and at least fourteen valiant *Rakshasas*. Would he cry out Sita, Lakshmana in a piteous voice? It was not necessary for Sita to believe this. Lakshmana told her that it was deceit and trickery. It was not necessary for Sita to have been *stubborn and driven him to follow him* and even in stubbornness what words she had uttered to make Lakshmana go! She knew that her brother-in-law was righteous and pure minded and that he worshipped Rama and herself as if they were father and mother.

Yet she told him that he had come with her and her husband on account of an evil desire to have her, that he hoped that the brother might die in order to have his wife and that this was his reason for not going to Rama's succour. She had uttered these cruel impossibilities and driven the innocent fellow to leave her alone. And for what great object? Just to make it possible for Ravana to carry her away? If one might reply in the fashion in which she had insulted Lakshmana, it might be said that she was tired of Rama and wished to provide an opportunity for somebody to take her and therefore drove out Lakshmana. She had created an opportunity and been taken by Ravana and given occasion for the world to talk as it liked. Grieving in abduction and living without food and neglecting her toilet and keeping pure would not prevent that talk. People were sure to say "Would Ravana leave untouched so beautiful a woman in his own palace for a full year?" Those who did not know Sita would say "What is the wonder? Ravana was a hero of the three worlds and prosperous. Rama was an exile and helpless. Even Sita's mind could not have remained constantly true to Rama." Whether the world spoke of Ravana and Sita in this manner or did not speak it was quite certain to talk lightly of Rama. "One year Sita had remained in Ravana's harem. Yet Rama took her back. She was beautiful and he could not bring himself to give her up. The pot was unclean but as it was pretty it was taken into the house." Is it to be wondered at that Rama felt that his lineage had received an eternal stain? He felt a surge of love and pity for

Sita as she had suffered for one year. She was now free and lived. He at the same time felt an uprising of wrath at the thought of the unutterable words she had spoken to Lakshmana and all the tribulation she had brought on them all in consequence. He felt deep shame in that this woman whom he had rescued with so much trouble had made him and his lineage light in the eyes of the world. What could Sita say in mitigation of all this? If Rama had accepted Sita because she was good it might have been sufficient so far as he was concerned. For the world it would have been insufficient. Who should answer the world? In the tumult of that moment's emotions Rama said what the world would have said. Those who reproach Rama's conduct should give some thought to human nature. If necessary they may ask themselves what they would have done in the same circumstances. If they have seen something similar in the life around them they should recollect what were the words and conduct of the people concerned in such an occurrence. They should realise the psychology of the mother who has warned the child not to go near the fire and on his doing it in spite of the warning has pulled him back and beaten him. The words uttered by Rama in the emotional tumult of the moment left Sita only one course. She had to prove to the world that she was pure. She therefore got a fire made and entered it. The poem describes the incident of this entry into the fire with the conventions of poetry. If we strip the narration of what is extraordinary what is the description that remains? Sita entered fire not to die but to prove that she was pure. This was a way of

testing goodness It is known in history elsewhere It is known in stray places even now Those who practise an ordeal of the kind believe that the elements do no harm to the virtuous When Sita entered the fire and came out alive she established to the satisfaction of the world that she was pure As she entered fire Sita said "As I have been pure may the fire protect me" She knew that she was pure and believed that the fire she was entering would not injure her She did not expect to be burnt by the fire Similarly Rama believed that the fire would do her no harm He knew she was pure and would come out safe from the ordeal That is why he did not prevent Sita from entering the fire The world knew that Sita had been in Ravana's harem for one year Let the same world know that she established her purity by an ordeal of fire When Sita had succeeded in the ordeal and established her purity and returned to him, Rama made this clear "I knew that she was pure but all this had to be done to show to the world that she was so" This was not said merely because the ordeal had ended happily Rama knew the ways of man's heart The bitterness of the cruel words that Sita had uttered to Lakshmana in sending him to succour Rama would be still there in Lakshmana's mind If that bitterness should be removed it was necessary that Rama should express his displeasure at her conduct It may be asked "What if Sita had been burnt in the fire instead of coming out?" What Rama desired in life was pleasure which had its root in righteousness He never turned his back on goodness to stretch his hand for happiness If in

establishing her innocence Sita had burnt herself in the fire. Rama would have grieved but he would not have repented for having driven her to the ordeal. One has to enter fire to keep a good name. For the sake of truth he had given up kingship and come to the forest. For the sake of truth she would have given up life entering the fire. To later generations keeping their lives in boxes and locking them up for safety death may seem the most terrible of occurrences. We are like children who turn their faces away from anything ugly and we refuse to contemplate death which is all around us and is every moment following us. We feel therefore that Sita's entry into the fire was a terrific happening. It could not have seemed so terrific either to Rama who had slain thousands of *Rakshasas* or to Sita who should have seen all around her at the moment thousands of corpses scattered on the battlefield. They were both persons of self respect and to both it must have appeared that honour in death was more desirable than life in dishonour. Dying for the sake of honour is no new incident in the life of humanity. It has been seen in the history of all races. Sita would have been happy only if she could believe that no one suspected her. It was to convince the world of her innocence that she had offered to come and see Rama in the condition in which she lived in her prison without a bath without toilet in the clothes she had worn throughout the year with her hair uncombed. Rama felt that this would not be sufficient proof to the world and gave word to what he believed would be the world's attitude. When Sita felt that there could be question

about her purity, there was a burning of the soul within her. In such a situation the fire within makes the fire without cool and bearable. To those who realise these facts Rama's unkind words will seem the most proper ones that could have been uttered in the circumstances. A husband has to guard his wife's body. He has equally to guard her good name. He has to do everything necessary to guard that name. If a husband does not utter the unkind word at such a moment and prove the wife's innocence, who can utter that word and prove that innocence? In bringing to her ears the unkind words that the world might say, Rama acted as Sita's friend. This justification of Rama's conduct may appear too subtle, jugglery making black appear white. This is all that need be said in reply to such a thought. Imagine the circumstances, consider what else that husband could have done to that wife in her own interests, consider then how the world might have treated the husband and the wife and thereafter find fault with Rama. One thing only let us not say in this context. "How did it matter what the world would have said of Sita? Was it not enough if Rama knew that she was pure?" To do something that brings us pleasure and to say that it does not matter how it appears to the world so long as it is right in our opinion, is not the way of great life. Great souls do say at times that the world's opinion does not matter. But on such occasions they, in defiance of the world's opinion, take a course that brings them trouble. Rama should have known at the moment that the world would stigmatise him as heartless. Yet, for his, his wife's and his line's

good name he chose the harder course. Not Sita only entered the fire. With her Rama also entered a fire. And when she came out safe he too came safe out of a fire. It was because those two minds and those two lives were one in this fashion that they moved in different paths for a little while and then became one. This too was also the reason for Sita immediately after the incident sitting on Rama's lap having no longer in mind the cruelty of his words. Having proved her innocence by her ordeal Sita sitting on her husband's lap could face the world with courage. The poet says that she was a little shy when she sat on Rama's lap. This shyness was shyness that betokened happiness. If she had sat on that lap without undergoing the ordeal there would have been a question in the minds of many that looked on her. If then she had shown this shyness there was a likelihood of their interpreting it as not merely shyness but shame and shame for reasons not very creditable to womanhood.

#### ONE OTHER POINT

A suggestion is sometimes made even by those who on the whole admire Valmiki's picture of Rama that there is something of the prig in the character. For example when on seeing Bharata's army *Lakshmana suspects that brother's motive and rails against him*. Rama administers him a very unkind rebuke and extols Bharata. It is suggested that Rama should have given credit to Lakshmana for having spoken out of love for him and need not have rebuked him so severely and assumed so superior an



attitude in thinking generously of Bharata. The long argument with Kowsalya in which this son seems to teach his mother her duty may appear to be another instance of conduct bordering on priggishness. Something like this is implied in the statement of a foreign critic that the conduct of Rama is painfully correct. The fact is that any person who, like Rama, constantly examines conduct and consciously follows the right, is in danger of looking like a prig. But Rama was no cold moralist. He had warm affections and the mother whom he reminded of her duty knew the love for her that lay behind the son's words of remonstrance. That was how at the end of the talk she was still feeling that she was elder and superior and gave her blessings to her son. Lakshmana knew that, in using strong language to vindicate Bharata, his elder was bating no jot of his love for himself, the other younger brother. He knew it was Rama's way to think well rather than ill of any man, that he would do this even of himself, Lakshmana, and that, if the elder spoke freely and rebuked him, it only showed that he was dearer to Rama than others. To be rebuked by Rama in such a way was a privilege which he alone enjoyed. That was how, immediately after the rebuke, he stood with his elder for what was to come, easy as ever with him and undiminished in stature. Universal fairness and constant rectitude like Rama's do not become a habit without continuous practice, and there is something in such correctness of conduct which justifies the adjective "painful." But all goodness seems painful when we think of the effort by which it becomes possible and

there is no goodness however ordinary which has not involved if it does not involve effort. But there is joy in being good and that makes the effort worth while. Rama showed that he was aware that he was aiming at a high standard of conduct as when he told Kaikeyi that he was something of an ascetic but this was done not in self-laudation but in order to reassure that step-mother and almost as it were in self-defence. Valmiki says of Rama that he was exceedingly valiant but was not admiring his own valour. That is a good description of the hero. This attitude of Rama's applied to his other qualities. He was striving to be good and generally succeeding but was not feeling that he was a superior person. What seems to us priggishness in his conduct was the inevitable concomitant of conduct that was consciously right taken out of its setting. In that life itself goodness struck people as just goodness and nothing else. It did not appear to any one as self-righteousness. Rama's self-consciousness repelled no one it seems on the contrary to have reassured people and drawn them closer to him.

### SITA

We may now consider the manner in which the poet has pictured Sita. It has been said that the writer of the introduction to the Ramayana has described it as the great story relating to Sita. If the Ramayana is to be called by any other name it can only be called the story of Sita. The poet who wished to show how valiant great-souled and true Rama was

wished just as greatly or even more greatly to show that Rama's wife was courageous, great-souled and pure. There is no lengthy description of the happiness of the family life of Rama and Sita in the poem. But there is sufficient indication of that happiness. When Janaka placed the hand of his daughter in Rama's hand and said "This daughter of mine, Sita, is your companion in *dharma*" these two were still young. Yet Sita had already learnt what the responsibilities of a companion in *dharma* were. Thought of the greatness of her father's lineage, sight of that father's continual practice of righteousness and realization of the goodness of her mother's conduct had brought to the young woman a complete conception of the good life. That was how she was as ready to go with her husband to the forest and endure hardship as she was to stay with him in the palace and share his pleasures. Just as it was right from the husband's point of view to ask the wife to stay in the palace, she knew it was right from the wife's point of view to insist on accompanying the husband. She insisted on doing this, immediately he suggested that she should stay, and she did this naturally, and as if there was nothing else for her to do. Rama was conquered by the strength of this insistence and realised as never before the character of Sita's love for him. "Do as you wish, it is what I wish also," he said. "This conduct becomes you. By it you become my companion as desired by your father." To make Rama realise how sincerely she desired to go with him Sita stopped at nothing. She scorned him when that became necessary. From her

on a point of view he urged that she desired to go to the forest that life in the forest would be pleasant that it was her destiny to live in a forest. From his point of view she said that as she had conducted herself as a good wife he had no reason to abandon her that to leave her and go would not become a valiant prince that he would not be a burden to him in his life in exile and that he would be satisfied with whatever life brought her in the forest. If he did abandon her and go alone he told him it would be a stain upon his prowess. When Lakshmi told her to enter the fire Sita did not say to him the words which he said when he asked her to stay in Ayodhya in care and comfort. They were words which seemed inconsistent with a womanly modesty. That Sita did not hesitate to utter any word when the situation demanded them appears also from what he said to Lakshmi to make him go to Rama's help. At the first glance one wonders why this woman said such extraordinary words to her husband's brother. But if we realize the time and the circumstances we understand that it was not possible for Sita to say anything else to Lakshmi. Rama had pursued the deer which was suspected of being a deceit of the *Rakshasas*. Lakshmi had stated that it should be Maricha. He was staying behind wondering how the situation might develop. Sita herself had doubts whether the animal that her husband had pursued was or was not a deer. These people were living in a part of the forest infested with *Rakshasas*. It is quite certain that the inmates of the hermitage had talked often of the great power the cunning deceit

and other ways of Maricha and his like. When therefore a cry came from the woods in the voice of Rama, what should become of Sita? Rama asked himself this question when he heard Maricha cry "Sita Lakshmana", in a feigned voice. A thousand people might assure Sita that it was not Rama that had cried. Sita herself might have felt that it was probable that it was not Rama that had cried. But supposing that it was Rama? Supposing that, having spent an hour or two thinking it was not Rama, they went and found that it was Rama, wounded and lying on the ground? Was it possible for a wife to remain at peace and not send help when there was a cry for help in the husband's voice? This wife in any case was unable to be at peace. If the cry was really from Rama it would be a good thing for Lakshmana to go. Supposing it was not from Rama, what was the harm done? Lakshmana would go, and presently he and Rama would return. What was the risk involved except that she would be alone in the hermitage till they came? What could happen in the very short interval? If the whole thing was a plot of the *Rakshasas*, something might occur in the interval. Sita should have feared this possibility. But in the rush of the terror for Rama, she was unable to dwell on this possibility and to weigh the harm that might occur if Rama did not receive help with the harm that might occur if it was a plot and to decide in favour of the less dangerous course. She had neither the time nor the mind. Her one feeling was that something might have occurred to Rama and that Lakshmana should go to his help. When Lakshmana

from a sense of duty told her that he could not leave her alone and go she lashed out her cruel words. It is noteworthy that in this narration the poet has left no interval between Lakshmana's refusal to leave Sita and her words of insult. Sita did not say ten other things that she might have said before making her extraordinary and improper suggestion. Immediately Lakshmana told her that he had to obey his brother and stay on guard she whipped him with her words. Lakshmana might have desisted from going to Rama's help but he could not have stayed to guard Sita. This was Sita's intention. Her one desire was that Lakshmana should leave her immediately and join Rama. Remonstrance and counter remonstrance would have taken time and Sita was not prepared to lose time in an elaborate discussion of the *pros* and *cons*. It is quite certain that it was not pleasant to her to shape into words a thought which she would not ordinarily have allowed even to come into her mind but she did it in order that her husband might have help. Such conduct in women for the person she loves is natural and often seen in life. Poetry has often recognised this. In truth the courage that Sita showed when she entered the fire to prove her innocence was not greater than the courage she showed in flinging this insult on Lakshmana. All the more is this the case because she had in fact no doubt whatever about Lakshmana's goodness. When Ravana came and abducted her the first name that Sita called out was that of Lakshmana. When Hanuman brought her Rama's message she enquired about Lakshmana and praised him. She had

understood quite clearly what sacrifice Lakshmana had made in order to be of use to Rama and to herself. When Rama by words of insult made her life unbearable and she wanted a fire to be made, it was Lakshmana that she asked to make it. In all these instances the poet has disclosed the nature of a noble woman's heart. Woman is not man's satellite, nor a rib, nor even a half of him, though with the honour of being the better half. Woman is a complete being even as man is, with her own law of life, her own duty, her own ways of self-fulfilment. Similarly, in the hundred other instances of Sita's life recounted in the story, we see a noble and essentially womanly nature faithfully delineated. When Kowsalya asked Sita to treat her son, Rama, though an exile from power, with respect, the daughter-in-law might have told the mother-in-law "Without this instruction from you, I have started for the forest with him. Do I need to be taught my duty to my husband?" Sita did not say so. She accepted Kowsalya's advice. When Anasuya asked her to describe her marriage to Rama, Sita, like any young woman happy in marriage, told the old lady the story of her girlhood, gave an account of her marriage and spoke in pride of her noble husband. When, again, Anasuya spoke to her of wifely duty, Sita accepted advice in the same spirit in which she had accepted similar advice from her mother-in-law. Though seemingly complaisant Sita did not hesitate to advise Rama when necessary regarding his duty. When Rama promised to help the sages of Dandakaranya and put down the *Rakshasas*, Sita asked him to consider if he was





Sugriva's town Sita desired immediately to see the women of Sugriva's household, and took them with her to Ayodhya. Friendliness and consideration for friends, nothing drove from her nature. In the happy hour when she was crowned with her husband on the throne of his father's Rama gave her a garland as a present. Sita desired to give that garland to Hanuman to whom she owed her happiness, and with Rama's approval she gave it to that great servant and benefactor. Hanuman had come to Sita in her dark hour. With him had come the first hope of light. He was therefore to her a symbol of returning happiness. So much so that when he wished to return to Rama she had asked him to stay for another day. Her husband's messenger was to her even as that husband's ring, the embodiment of the assurance that she was loved and would be rescued. Sita therefore gave to Hanuman in the hour of her triumph treatment that she gave to none else. Among the great heroines of world literature Sita stands in the forefront. Poetry has not seen and has not pictured anything nobler.

#### LAKSHMANA

In his conception of Lakshmana Valmiki has shown the same completeness. Between Rama and Lakshmana there was no difference in years. The brothers were born within an interval of days or hours. Yet the impression produced by their behaviour to each other is that of an interval of years. This is due to the fact that the younger acted with respect because the other was elder, and the elder

acted with consideration because the other was younger. As happens in families with several children Rama and Lakshmana became companions from childhood up. Bharata and Satrugaha forming another pair. Rama and Lakshmana were told did not eat nor lie down except in company. Once such companionship is developed it continues through out life. The elder may possibly at some stage in life not need the younger but the younger will be unable to live without the elder. When Rama and Lakshmana married Lakshmana we may believe moved somewhat out of Rama's life but his own life was ever turned towards Rama. In the way in which they lived Rama needed Sita for his household life and Lakshmana in all other activities. Lakshmana thus became dearer to Rama than any other person. It appears as if Lakshmana was always suspecting Bharata as a rival of Rama. From the moment that Kaikeyi wanted her son to become king to the hour in which Bharata met Rama in the forest and returned with his footwear Lakshmana was constantly suspecting Bharata. Told to go to the forest Rama did not lose his temper. To think of such a thing having been said to Rama Lakshmana flared up and spoke without control reproaching Kaikeyi denouncing his father and boasting that his arms were not mere ornament and that his bow was not held for decoration. Lakshmana did not realise that Rama's decision not to stay in Ayodhya proceeded from his sense of right. He knew that Rama could look after himself. He was not unaware that if his elder brother wished to stay in Ayodhya he had the power to

enforce his wish, and that he could do it without another's help. Yet he spoke in boastful words, as a boy might, offering help to Rama. The words proceeded, however, not from boastfulness but from his love for his brother. When Rama overruled all remonstrance and decided on proceeding to the forest, Lakshmana, without expressly telling him so, decided that he would go with him and indicated this in speaking to Kowsalya. If he had told Rama directly, at the moment, that he would accompany him, Rama might have objected. To the implication in Lakshmana's words to Kowsalya Rama could not object. This silence Lakshmana treated as equivalent to consent. When Rama did not agree to Lakshmana accompanying him and his wife to exile, this brother fought for the privilege of going with him as violently as the wife had done earlier. Sumitra told Lakshmana that he had been made for life in the forest. Lakshmana showed by his conduct that this was so. Lakshmana's desire to be with Rama was as much on Rama's account as on his own. It was a pleasure to him to be with Rama but Rama needed his services. He said this to Rama. We have only to read the Ramayana once and it is impossible thereafter to imagine how Rama and Sita could have lived in the forest without Lakshmana, or Rama without Sita and Lakshmana. When a hermitage had to be built, Rama told Lakshmana to select a place which he and Sita thought suitable. Lakshmana begged him not to give him such commands. "Do not tell me this kind of thing. See what place is suitable and tell me to build, and I shall build." This younger brother

refused to take any decision for his elder. The elder should command and he obey. Lakshmana had the qualities required to rule but had learnt to walk in submission to an elder's will. In a world where people unfit to rule scramble for power this man with the ability to rule agreed to serve. When Lakshmana built the hermitage with apartments for food and rest Rama expressed approval of the work and said that Lakshmana's love prevented him from feeling his father's death. Lakshmana conducted himself to his brother and sister-in-law with the simplicity of a child. He seems to have done obeisance to them every day. In doing this he saw day after day what ornament Sita wore on her feet. The other ornaments that she wore he had not noted. As Rama flew with her in the air Sita pulled out some of her jewels, tied them in a cloth and threw them to some *Vanaras* on the top of a hill. These *Vanaras* were Sugriva and his ministers. When Rama and Lakshmana met them they showed the ornaments. Lakshmana recognised the ornament of the feet. He did not recognise the ornaments worn on the arm or in the ear. It was because his mind was so pure that Lakshmana flamed in wrath when Sita attributed improper motives to him. Lakshmana had reviled his father in anger in Ayodhya. He had on this occasion to reproach his sister-in-law. He threw on her insult for insult and walked away to meet his brother. If Lakshmana had not been so short tempered he could have gone some distance and stayed in cover to make sure that Sita did not come to harm. He could thus have satisfied both his brother and his

sister-in-law But Lakshmana was impulsive and in a moment of anger did not stop to think Driven from the post of duty by the cruel words of his sister-in-law, Lakshmana received from Rama also reproach for having deserted the post This is a fate to which all service is liable When the brothers returned to the hermitage and saw that Sita was not there, Rama's heart was in a turmoil of anxiety and sorrow The poet describes the elder brother but says nothing of Lakshmana, but we can well imagine how the younger brother should have sunk into himself The sister-in-law who had lashed him with cruel words should have seemed to him less in the wrong, than he who ought to have borne the cruelty and stayed there and not deserted his post of duty Rama always remembered that Lakshmana had given up everything and followed him to the forest He therefore desisted from reproaching his brother at any length But it was clear that he thought that the fault was as much that of his brother as of the wife When after Sugriva's coronation there was delay in his proceeding to help Rama to recover Sita, Lakshmana went to him with a message from his brother The main feeling in Lakshmana's mind then was wrath on account of Sugriva's neglecting his brother As he entered Kishkindha he looked so terrible that the *Vanaras* felt afraid and moved away from him This wrath, however cooled down when in Sugriva's palace he heard the sounds of ladies' ornaments When women are by, a man should not show anger On hearing of Lakshmana's arrival Sugriva feared that he had come in displeasure and, therefore sent Tara

to speak to him and pacify him. Tīrī came up to Lakshmana and with the grace which was natural to her and with great good sense begged him not to be angry with Sugriva and to forgive him as a brother. This was enough to calm Lakshmana. In the fighting in Lanka Lakshmana fought like any other leader and bore his share of battle. When he crowned his achievement by slaying Indrajit and Rama praised him greatly, the younger brother felt shy. Rama took his brother to his lap and grieved to see how much he had been wounded. When Ravana threw a deadly weapon on Lakshmana and it made him swoon, it seemed to Rama as if his life was ruined for ever. He cried for his younger brother and talked as if this loss was greater than the loss even of Sita. When crowned king himself in Ayodhya Rama, if we may believe a passage which seems to have been added later, asked Lakshmana to become Yuvaraja. Some commentators suggest that this invitation was given in sarcasm, the elder implying that though Bharata was next in order and had to be Yuvaraja, Lakshmana who thought that he had greater love for Rama and rendered more service might feel that he had a better claim to be the king's deputy. In the context itself there is nothing to suggest that Rama spoke in other than good faith. There are verses in the Ramayana from which it appears that in order of birth Lakshmana was earlier than Bharata. The next in order of seniority to Rama was therefore Lakshmana and not Bharata. Lakshmana however did not accept the offer. He desired that Bharata should become the Yuvaraja. The fact is that after

Sita and Rama reached Ayodhya there was nothing that Lakshmana could have gained by deputy-kingship or other position. He was quite content in the enjoyment of his position of being Rama's brother. Many people laboured for Rama. The first place among them belongs to this younger brother of his. In valour, in purity, in rectitude, in truth, in love and in simplicity, we may find an equal of Lakshmana in literature, not a greater.

### BHARATA

Bharata does not occupy in Rama's story the large part that comes to Lakshmana. Yet his love of his brother is as dutiful and worthy of praise. He had no right to behave like a youngster. He was among the more important persons in the royal household. Yet, in reproaching his mother, in cursing himself and in obstinacy in requesting his brother's return to Ayodhya, he showed that his outlook was that of a very junior member of the household. The great skill of Valmiki's narration of Bharata's meeting his mother and learning of Rama's exile and of the King's death has been referred to earlier. Bharata's character comes out very well in that scene. He did not want kingship. He had always taken it for granted that Rama should be king. This was the custom of his lineage and he never entertained the idea that it should be transgressed on his account. When he found that his brother had gone into exile and his father had died in sorrow in order that he, the younger brother, might become king, he nearly lost balance and raved. In what he said to his mother in

reproof of her action he transgressed the bounds of propriety. When he wished to assure Kowsalya that he wished no harm to Rama he cursed himself with a violence in which also we see want of balance. He loved Rama so much and what had happened grieved him so deeply that words less strong could not satisfy his emotional need. It looks as if Bharata's attitude to Rama had not been understood by those around him. At any rate Kowsalya could believe that he might have wished to be king and Dasaratha would seem to have had some fear of the same sort. If this were not the case Dasaratha might have arranged for Rama's coronation when Bharata was not absent. There would then have been a check to the train of unhappy events which proceeded from Mandhara's evil counsel. Immediately he heard that Kaikeyi had made her requests Bharata would have objected and Rama's exile would have been prevented. Undemonstrativeness on Bharata's part and want of insight on Dasaratha's led to the tragedy of Rama's exile and the King's death. Bharata's grief that his brothers should have gone to exile was heightened when he heard the details of Rama's life on the day of his halt with Guha. That his imperial brother used to such comforts should have lain on the ground and used some hard thing for his pillow seemed to him the very crown of misfortune. When he saw in the grass on which Sita had torn bits of silk from her clothes he did not know how to contain his grief. As if this sorrow was not sufficient Bharata had to bear the gall of people's suspicion that he was not friendly to Rama. Guha suspected him



Bharadwaja suspected him. It looked as if almost any one could think that he loved Rama more than this younger brother did. Why did he pursue his elder brother? Was he not content with having got the kingdom? And Bharata had to give them assurance that he was loyal to Rama and meant well by him. Bharata met Rama in his forest abode and begged him again and again and in all sorts of ways to return to Ayodhya and rule. "My mother's wish has been fulfilled. Come back now and take what is yours." Rama not agreeing to return, Bharata took from him his footwear to stand for royalty. If Rama had permitted him Bharata would have stayed in the forest and served him as Lakshmana was doing, but, as the father's command had prescribed kingship to Bharata along with exile for Rama, this was not possible. Bharata, therefore, returned unwillingly to Ayodhya. The advice that Lakshmana received from his mother to consider the forest as Ayodhya is sometimes construed so as to mean that she wanted to think of Ayodhya as a wilderness. The Sanskrit sentence admits of this construction and commentators love to derive an extra meaning. Whether Sumitra meant it or not, there is no doubt that Ayodhya in Rama's absence became to many people no better than a wilderness. First among these was Bharata. He was unable to enter Ayodhya without Rama. He made his camp in a suburb on its outskirts and stayed there waiting for his brother's return. When that brother returned Bharata gave up to him with a feeling of relief the kingship which he had held in trust for him and which even as a trust he

had felt to be a burden. They also serve who only stand and wait. Bharata did not serve Rama in the manner in which Lakshmana served him. He served waiting. Lakshmana was aware of what was happening to Rama and exile was made bearable to him by Rama's company. Bharata was denied this relief. His heart should have been full of fear and foreboding for the exiles in the twelve years that he had to stay at his post of duty but that fear and foreboding were unrelieved by sight or news. As a type of brotherly conduct Bharata's is no less exalted than Lakshmana's.

### HANUMAN

There are only two other characters in the Ramayana drawn on the same scale as these Hanuman and Ravana. Hanuman was not related to Rama like Sita and Lakshmana by birth but the service he rendered has coupled his name with his master's as fast as the names of the wife and the brother. We first meet Hanuman in the Ramayana when he comes to Rama with an embassy from Sugriva. He seems then to have spoken in so agreeable a style that Rama and Lakshmana were struck with wonder. We may imagine that the brothers had heard in the hermitages dialects which compared badly with the pure speech of their own far North. Hanuman used speech which they recognised as purer and more grammatical. His manner also was so earnest and sincere that the brothers liked him immediately. The impression Hanuman produced on Rama was greatly responsible for the readiness with which Rama believed

Sugriva Hanuman was by then famous among his people for many acts of adventure and feats of valour. He came from Anjana and was believed to be the son of the Wind God. When Vali pursued his enemy Dundubhi into a cave and did not return for a long time Sugriva thought that his elder brother should have been slain and ascended the throne. Vali, however, had not been slain. He had taken time to vanquish Dundubhi, and when that was over he returned to find that Sugriva had assumed kingship. He waxed wroth feeling that his brother had turned a traitor, and drove him out. Hanuman apparently thought that this treatment was undeserved and accompanied Sugriva into exile. When Sugriva became king again with Rama's help, Hanuman naturally became his chief minister. Along with other great qualities Hanuman had one which made him unique in his clan. He was a celibate. The *Vanara* code of conduct permitted the elder brother to take the younger brother's wife into his harem in his absence and the younger brother to take the elder brother's widow to wife. We can imagine that in a community of this kind celibacy should have seemed impossibly noble. When parties of the *Vanaras* went out to the four quarters in search of Sita, Hanuman joined the party headed by Vali's son Angada and including Jambavan, king of the *Rikshas*. This party went south and, like the other parties, was commanded on pain of death to return with information within a month. The month was over and Angada's party had not finished searching its quarter and could not return. Sugriva was known for rigour, and Angada

and some of his followers thought that it was safer not to return. There was then some danger of the nephew staying in the fastnesses of the south and building a small principality for himself. The kingdom of the *Vanaras* would thus have been broken into two parts. This it seemed to Hanuman would be a great misfortune to come upon his people. Sugriva would lose part of his kingdom and it could not be for Angada's good either. The *Vanaras* had seen enough tragedy when the brothers Vali and Sugriva had prosecuted their quarrel. Just now they had settled down under one king and that they should again be split into different groups. Hanuman did not like. He therefore argued with Angada against the course he proposed and persuaded his companions that their safety lay in prosecuting the search and returning to Sugriva with all the information they could get. Soon after this the party fell in with Sampathi king of birds and learnt that Sita was taken to Lanka. It had then to decide as to who should cross the sea. It was found that the one person capable of doing this was Hanuman. Hanuman himself said nothing on the occasion. When the several heroes recounted how much of the sea they could cross Hanuman sat in silence listening. It was only when Jambavan told him that he had no peer among them all and that if he sat in silence they could not fulfil their mission that Hanuman undertook to cross the sea and look for Sita. We need not at this stage enquire if a *Vanara* flew in the sky across the sea. All that we need to believe here is that to reach the other side of the water was not work for a common

person and that Hanuman did it. Getting into Lanka, Hanuman looked for Sita in Ravana's palace. He happened in his search to enter Ravana's sleeping apartments and saw there, late in the night the beautiful women whom Ravana had collected from everywhere, lying unconscious and sleeping in all kinds of posture. He had to look on them in looking for Sita and at one moment asked himself if it was proper for a man with a vow of celibacy to see women in such a condition. He told himself the next moment that a woman had to be looked for among women and so he could not help the sight. His mind, however was unaffected by the beauty that he saw. Both the question and the answer indicate the kind of person that Hanuman was. He was constantly examining his own conduct. When that conduct was not bad he acquitted it. One's reason is in such a case a judge. One's conduct is as an accused before that tribunal. The mind states before the judge what harm there has or has not been in the conduct and the tribunal decides. The seat of justice within the soul is unlike any such seat outside. There is no room here for false accusation. There is equally no room for concealment of offence. Acquittal before this tribunal is possible only in a case of real innocence. Hanuman was so impervious to desire that he could look at all the beauty of Ravana's women and be unmoved. At the moment of setting his eyes on Mandodari he thought that she was Sita. As she was by the side of Ravana he immediately corrected himself. Sita could not be there. Later he saw Sita in the garden enclosure. Hanuman guessed from her

condition that she was Rama's wife. His sitting on the tree and talking in praise of Rama to attract her attention and to make her trust him shows how astute Hanuman was. In delivering his message to her there after Hanuman spoke with great propriety and discretion. When Sita again and again begged him to do whatever was necessary to make Rama come and rescue her. Hanuman entreated her not to have doubts on that score. Rama would surely come and rescue her. Sugriva had a numerous army and all whom he called servant were valiant. There is no one in Sugriva's presence such as Hanuman who is smaller than I. One wonders whether he really believed this particularly as he alone of the whole party that had come to the south had been able to cross the sea. And whether man or *Vanara* one has to be magnanimous to say such a thing. To make so little of one's own achievement and speak in such praise of other's ability one's heart should be greatly chastened and all self-love should have been shed. Hanuman's mind with all this wisdom was ingenuous. When he saw how greatly Sita languished from love of Rama he asked himself why he should not carry her on his back and bring the lovers together and immediately suggested this course to her. Such enthusiasm and such ingenuousness are possible only to the purest natures. It has been already suggested that the section relating to the burning of Lanka is not part of Valmiki's work. It is therefore unnecessary to make any comment on the character of Hanuman as it appears in that story. The fact that Hanuman brought news of Sita made him the trusted servant

of Rama. His bringing the drug which restored Lakshmana from the swoon into which Ravana's deadly *sakti* threw him confirmed the relationship. It was thus Hanuman that went to Sita with the message of Rama's victory. It was he again who went to Bharata with news that Rama was coming. This was how Sita came to do him the unique honour of giving him the garland which her husband presented to her at the hour of coronation. An eulogist who composed praise of Hanuman called him the jewel in the great garland of Rama's story. This is just praise. In his conception of the character of Hanuman, Valmiki reached a height of imagination equal to that in which he conceived Rama or Sita.

#### RAVANA

Ravana is a character worthy to stand facing these great figures. He had vanquished the Gods in battle. He had brought away from his brother Kubera, after a victory, his aerial car. He had made Lanka the treasure-house of the best things in the world. But in the course of all this achievement he had shown cruelty. Ravana had brought away beautiful women from all the countries he had conquered and included them in his harem. Hanuman saw numerous beauties in the sleeping apartments of Ravana. The description indicates that there had been drinking in company earlier in the night and that all were lying fatigued after a long and strenuous bout of pleasure. Dasaratha, like Ravana, had many women. But it does not appear as if the King of Ayodhya ever lived, as Ravana apparently did, sporting amidst a hundred

women at the same time Ravana valued the pleasures of the bed rather more than an average person. As king and conqueror his opportunities were greater and he had not disdained them. Secure in his island in this life of pleasure Ravana had parties of his men stationed in the forests on the other side of the sea to molest the sages from the north. Ravana it would seem was a descendant of Brahma and knew the Vedas. He might have had some sense of rivalry with the people from the north who practised other rites from his own. In an enterprise in Rama's early years in which Maricha tried to interfere with Viswamitra's sacrifice that sage had obtained Rama's help and Maricha had been beaten off. This should have been one of many occasions in which the northern sages had had to fight protagonists of the culture of Lanka. When Rama came into southern Dandak the sages immediately thought of getting his assistance and protection. Rama promised to help them and in fulfilment of the task thus undertaken slew certain of Ravana's brothers who commanded the outpost in Janasthana. In the ordinary course another army might have come from Lanka or Ravana might have come with some following and there might have been battle but Ravana's outlook in life gave a different form to reprisal. Ravana's sister suggested to him that the proper way to punish Rama was to bring away his wife. This might have been a very appropriate suggestion from Surpanakha who was envious of Sita's beauty. But what about Ravana? Curiously enough he also thought that the course suggested was good. This was because his desire to



have a woman was greater than his undoubted valour. This trait in Ravana's character was apparently known to all around him. Immediately, therefore, Ravana held counsel with Maricha. Dissuaded by that wise person at first, he persisted and forced Maricha, against his will, to help him in a plan to draw Rama and Lakshmana away from the hermitage and steal the lonely Sita. That so able a warrior should have thought it not improper to carry away a helpless woman is strange, but this obviously, was in grain. Ravana appeared before Sita in the guise of an ascetic. The diaphanous of asceticism left his mind unaltered and we find that on seeing Sita's extraordinary beauty, Ravana fell to describing her grace in a manner inconsistent with his trappings. As he looked like an ascetic Sita put up with his praise. Within a few minutes Ravana caught hold of her by force and started for Lanka. Jatayu tried to stop him, Ravana killed Jatayu. Reaching Lanka, Ravana showed Sita his boundless wealth and asked her to become his queen and make that wealth hers. Not all women reject such wealth for the sake of virtue. Ravana had previously seen only women who did not reject. Not all women, however, so love wealth that they would lose their souls for it. Ravana did not realise that Sita was a woman of this kind. He thought that even if Sita did not accept him immediately, she would do so some time later. He tried to teach her that youth does not endure and is like the water of a flowing stream running not to return. When this sermon about the fleeting nature of youth and beauty did not move Sita from her resolve, Ravana

placed a guard around her and gave her a year to change her mind and hoped that time might help her to look on him differently. Ravana thought it impossible that Rama a mere man and not much of one should cross the sea and come to Lanka and rescue Sita. Yet Rama did come one day and Ravana had to face his *Vanara* hordes with his own *Rakshasa* army and fight. Sita had advised Ravana not to make an enemy of Rama to hand her back to him and live. Ravana did not listen. As news came that Rama was marching with his army to the sea Vibhishana Ravana's brother advised him to become friends with Rama and give up Sita. Ravana did not relish the advice and Vibhishana had to abandon his brother and go to Rama. As commander after commander of his armies died in battle Ravana grew more and more incensed and went to Sita and tried to frighten her. He got two heads made like Rama's and Lakshmana's showed them to her and told her that her husband and brother in law had been killed.

Be mine now he said. His desire for a woman's company was great enough to make him think all this proper. Some news of battle came in just that moment and Ravana had to return. The counterfeit heads of Rama and Lakshmana disappeared and Sita's fear became less. Ravana at last gave up his life. He had persisted in an evil course against the advice of his nearest and dearest and sacrificed to his obstinacy brothers sons and relatives and finally himself. The qualities that we see in Ravana are thus mainly valour which was fouled by a tendency to cruelty stratagem amounting to trickery which seems

inconsistent with real valour, infatuation for beauty which thought no procedure for winning a woman unfair, distrust of friendly counsel when it seemed to counter his wishes and insolent belief in his own invincibility. He had the feeling that one should enjoy oneself while youth lasts. He had the stubbornness that refuses to admit error whatever the cost. These qualities in Ravana were, however, of an order worthy of the great king of Lanka. In magnitude they equalled his great record of success and achievement and made him a worthy opponent of the heroic Rama. The poet's imagination has reached in this character also the heights which it reached in the delineation of Rama and Sita and of Hanuman and Rama's brothers.

In the midst of many bad qualities there was in Ravana one that was good. This *Rakshasa* who brought Sita by trickery and force did not use force to take her to his bed. Persons who imagine that they know all of human nature find it impossible to believe Valmiki here. Such doubt has always been felt and people have found it necessary to state reasons for Ravana's forbearance. It is suggested in the Ramayana that the reason was a curse that Ravana had received from a woman whom he had forced, that the next time he violated a woman he would die. We read of primitive populations having a taboo in this matter. A woman brought by force is to be given a year to make up her mind. She should not be compelled before the year is over. Ravana in the story gives a year's time to Sita. It is possible there was a curse and he feared it. It is

equally possible that there was this custom in his race. It is possible that it was from restraint and consideration more than because of such fear or custom that he desisted from forcing Sita. But more than consideration or taboo or custom was a certain trait in Kama's character of which Valmiki leaves us in no doubt. I KAMA was not a raga who could derive pleasure by forcing a woman who did not care for him. He had known the pleasures of the bed at the best and was aware that they were worthwhile only with a willing partner who shared desire. He did not desire the company of Sita disconsolate with her hair uncombed for Pama. He desired a Sita who would have abandoned all thought of Kama and who would have lost her heart to the splendours of I nka ling. He wanted a Sita who would be proud of being first among his queens and of loving him. He :

deserve severe punishment for this" he said "but the man who loves feels pity for the person he loves, so I do you no harm" This was no doubt due to an element of goodness in Ravana's character. This element made it possible for Sita to live in honour to join Rama again. If Ravana had been the ruffian to force her to be his, as he had been to abduct her, Sita would have had to forsake life. Valmiki has thus in his picture of Ravana painted the complexity of a nature great even in its errors.

One important point regarding Valmiki's delineation of the character of Ravana which has been noted by lovers of literature is that the poet is successful in retaining our sympathies for Rama without being unjust to Ravana. Ravana has great qualities but he has also grave defects. Rama has some defects but his great qualities outweigh them. For a contrast it is shown that Milton's Satan so engages the readers' regard that he becomes almost the hero of the poem. Such an undesigned effect is not produced by Valmiki's picture of Ravana. Valmiki gives in detail the aspects of Ravana's character which make him small even as in some matters he was great. Valmiki could do this because he pitied Ravana and to that extent was his superior. He understood and he sympathised. When Hanuman wished to punish the *Rakshasa* women who had been Sita's guard, Sita told him to forbear. However evil they may be, even those who deserve death have a claim to our pity. When the question whether Vibhishana should be accepted or not came up, Rama said that even if Ravana came he would forgive that enemy and accept

him. Pity even for those who had treated one hard forgiveness even of the enemy who had done mortal injury were the qualities in Sita and Rama that Valmiki respected. Like his hero and his heroine he pitied the wrong doer and forgave him. This was how he was able to gain pity and forgiveness to Rama from the readers of his poem. Inmity ends with death said Rama. Hatred and contempt for Rama's badness Valmiki seems to say should cease now he is dead.

### THE MINOR CHARACTERS

These pictures of Dasaratha and his queens of Rama his wife and brothers and trusted servant and of Lakshmana are full length portraits in Valmiki's gallery. The poem is full of numerous other characters. They are not painted on the same scale but are sufficiently important. Vasishtha priest to Dasaratha who bore his honour of being a Maharshi lightly and showed regard to the old king because he was king who acted as teacher to Dasaratha his queens and children who submitted to the decree of fortune which exiled Rama and got Bharata and made him king that the lineage might continue. Sumantra who like Vasishtha had been the king's companion from childhood and become his friend who was angry with Kaikeyi for having brought about Rama's exile and accompanied Rama on the journey to the forest up to the Ganges who brought to the king the last news he had of his sons and daughter in law and acted with great discretion in reporting their words. Cuhli the hunter king who placed at Rama's disposal on his

way to the forest all his wealth and helped him to cross the Ganges with wife and brother, who loved Rama sufficiently to suspect Bharata's motive in following him to the forest, and who though a member of a forest people attained the status of a friend of Rama's line, Mandhara who was more anxious for her mistress' prosperity than even that mistress herself and roused in her mind an envy which exiled Rama and made Bharata king, Anasuya who attended to Sita as to a daughter and asked her to describe her marriage gave her jewellery and clothes and wished to see her decorating herself, and desired the young lady to go to her husband, Sabari who gathered fruit and waited long to give it to Rama and, when he came told him that her austerities had reached fruition that day, Sugriva the younger brother who, because he was younger felt almost powerless and ran from his elder brother and lived in solitude who became a king by Rama's help and immersed in pleasure almost forgot his duty to him who sent Tara to pacify Lakshmana who marched with his *Vanara* hordes behind Rama to Lanka and fought Ravana in most inopportune duel, who finally won back Sita for his friend and when that friend was crowned in Ayodhya received hospitality in the friend's own palace Vali who showed inordinate wrath to his brother and drove him out and kept his wife who would not believe that a prince of the race of Ikshvaku would come and do him harm without reason who reproached Rama for having taken sides with Sugriva without enquiry and injured him from cover who finally submitted to what had been done,





valiant as the best of them all, skilled in concealment and camouflage in warfare, and devoted heart and soul to the service of his father, Mandodari who accepted her position as one of Ravana's many wives without complaint and, when he stole another woman and died for her lamented his having thought of Sita though she herself was his, Satrughna, Bharadwaja, Agastya, Janaka, Angada, Sampathi, Surpanakha all these pictures are found in Valmiki's gallery, each one worthy of detailed study. There is no room for such study here but the important thing to remember is that in every one of them we see the master-singer's insight into human nature and his power of delineation. The same mind which made the elaborate pictures of the other characters was at work on these minor characters also. In the picture of no character is there anything vague and in no detail is the execution indifferent.

## IX DESCRIPTION

### NATURE

VALMIKI, who knew and described man so well, knew and described equally well what is called nature. Two ways of describing nature are known to poetry. To the eye that knows, there is joy in the contemplation of the world around just as it is. When that joy finds expression we have a simple and straightforward description of the thing as it is and is observed by the poet. Another way is to invest

what one sees in nature with a light thrown by one's imagination and give a new shape to the thing seen. Generally the two ways mingle. It may appear to some minds that the former kind of description is easy and that transmutation of fact through the imagination of the poet is difficult. To others the contrary may appear to be the case. In fact description in either way is equally difficult. The poet who has the gift can bring beauty into his writing in either of these ways which he fancies. The poet without a gift can only fail in both. He who would describe should see. That requires an eye and a mind. He needs too the discrimination which picks up the details that matter and assembles them so as to produce an impression of the whole. To do this whether in a straightforward way or the imaginative way requires a competent imagination and skill and discretion. If any really good description of nature in either kind seems easy we may be sure that that ease is only apparent. The more easy it seems the greater is the power and the greater the practice and skill behind it. In the greatest poets like Valmiki we get description of both kinds that is beautiful. Some examples may be given to show Valmiki's manner in the two kinds of description. Viswamitra is on his journey in the wood with Rama and Lakshmana showing them hill and stream and hermitage and telling them stories. One night he went on with his stories very long and then said: "We have spent half the night with these stories. Sleep now my princes. May good befall you and no harm come in this journey. The trees are motionless and still and bird

and beast are merged in them. 'The darkness of night has covered the quarters. Evening has slipped away and the sky is shining with the light of its eyes, the stars. 'The moon with his cool rays has risen and dispersed the darkness of the world and delighted the hearts of living creatures." In Chitrakoota Rama speaks to Sita of the beauty of the hill. "As I am seeing this beautiful hill, my auspicious one, I feel not the pain of loss of kingship and of separation from those I love. Look at this unshaken eminence! Full of birds of many kinds, how beautiful it is with its peaks! They seem to pierce the dome of the heavens and please the eye with their many colours: some are the colour of silver, some red, some are yellow, some *mangista* and some are bright like ruby." Rama then names thirty kinds of trees which give shade and look delightful with fruit and flower. Rama describes the Mandakini. "Look at the Mandakini, my love, delightful with its picturesque sands and attended on by swans and other water birds and full of lotus flowers. Many are the kinds of trees standing on its bank, bearing fruit and flower, and the stream shines like a lake of the Gods. These pleasant waters made turbid by hordes of thirsty animals delight me by their sight. The sages of the forest in matted locks and deer skin and hempen clothes bathe in these waters. The hill with the wood on its peak, agitated by wind, seems to be dancing wildly and is scattering leaf and flower on the water in front. See the transparent water and the people scattered along the banks. See these flowers blown by the wind and scattered on the banks and those

flowers floating with the stream. The Chakravaka birds of the sweet note have got on them my auspicious one and are uttering delicious sounds. Rama describes a morning to Lakshmana. It is the hour of sunrise and the Goddess of Night has left. Thus very black bird the cuckoo is singing here and from the wood we hear the great sound of the peacock's call.

Anasura describes nightfall. The sun has gone down in splendour of colour drawing auspicious night unto him. You hear the twittering of the birds which in the day had gone in all directions in search of food and have come to their nest now it is evening for sleep. These sages of the hermitage yet after a bath and with their hempen clothes dripping water are returning together with their vessels in their hands. Smoke of dark red colour rising from the sacrificial fire of the sages is seen lifted by the wind. The trees with not too many leaves appear all together solid. Even from this raised ground the quarters are not bright. The creatures of the night are moving all around and the animals of the hermitage have come in and are lying in the neighbourhood of the sacrificial platforms. Night has come out decked with the stars and the moon in his wrap of light is seen risen in the sky. Rama shows Lakshmana a spot suited for building their hermitage. The ground is even and looks beautiful surrounded by flowering trees. Not far you see the delightful lake beautiful with its horde of lotus bright and large like the sun and sweetly fragrant. Here is the Godavari pleasing with its trees resorted to by swans and other water birds beautiful with Chakravaka and visited

at a point neither too far nor too near by animals. The hills kiss the heavens and, with the sound of peacocks in their caves and trees in flower are delightful." Lakshmana describes the winter "The time of the year is come which you love greatly, brother, and by which the year is decorated and becomes auspicious. The world is stiff for dew the earth is full of crops, the waters are not enjoyable and the God of Fire gives delight. The good have worshipped the Gods with the rites of *Navagrayana* and have received absolution. People in the country are high with desire and have abundance of milk, and kings are abroad in search of conquest. As the sun has definitely clung to the southern quarter of the sky, the northern quarter, like a woman without the auspicious mark on her forehead, fails to shine. Always wealthy in snow, the mountain of snows, now that the sun has moved far justifies his name with his stores made manifest. With his power taken away by the sun, the moon, his circle red from mist, is dull like a mirror darkened by breath. The moonlit night of even the day of full moon is dulled with mist and does not shine. It looks like Sita browned by the sun but is not beautiful like her. The forest areas with the crops covered with dew drops are beautiful at sunrise by noisy *Crouncha* and *Sarasa*. The sun rising in the distance looks like the moon, his outflowing rays covered by mist and dew. The forest ground, with the turf slightly wet because of the season's dew, sparkles in the early sunlight. The elephant of the forest touches the clear and cool water and, though greatly thirsty pulls up its trunk. These water birds

are sitting beside the water and do not enter it as the timid do not enter a battle. Naturally dark but further darkened by the mist the woods bereft of flowers seem asleep. The rivers are beautiful with their waters covered by mist and with the birds to be inferred by their sounds and the sands wet with dew. In the description we see Valmiki simply stating facts about nature much as a scientist might for his purposes. The statements of fact about a morning or an evening or a place or a season become beautiful because of the impression they produce of the thing described. Viswamitra's description of night Anasuya's of evening and Rama's of early morning attain a simplicity that can hardly be excelled yet wise selection and skilful combination of detail make the all too matter of fact statement into full and perfect pictures. The description of rivers and places is somewhat longer but has its own economy of detail and little of it is repetition or superfluous. As the poet is describing a season he is stating a number of facts about the population the condition of the earth the sky the sun the moon of the birds and animals of forest and stream and at all hours of the day and night. Few persons would be able to state all these facts. But there is a quality about the facts themselves that indicates the poet's outlook. Valmiki was happy when people had gathered in or were about to gather in their harvest and had all the milk and curds that they desired. He sympathised with the elephant which withdrew its trunk in a hurry because the water was chill or with the bird which sat on the sands because the water of the river was too

cold to enter It is as if the poet's life mingled with the life of nature and became one with it Valmiki's descriptions of the sea reach magnificence of the same sort

Even simple description of nature gets the colour of human emotion when a person makes it in a moment of emotional stress Rama sits on the shore of Pampa, remembering Sita and grieving for the days that are gone, and anxious what is happening to her where she is He hears the notes of the Nathyuha birds and recollects how one day Sita, hearing these same notes, called out to him and asked him to hear them He sees a pea-hen walking up to its mate, and their joy in each other's company That male bird can dance and show off "Don't you see? His mate has not been stolen by a *Rakshasa*" The wind blows past the lotus and the flowers on a neighbouring tree in blossom and comes to Rama It reminds him of Sita's breath "It should be spring now where Sita is as it is here" How will his beloved bear the anguish of separation? His agony was unbearable So should hers be and she might take her own life Every one of these statements is deeply tinted with the feelings of the speaker In the kind of description which is known as the pathetic fallacy in Western literature Valmiki produces some fine effects When Ravana first came to Sita nature showed how dreadful he was The trees of Janasathana saw him and stopped all movement and became still The wind did not blow Godavari of the fast running waters saw this person of the red eyes and began to move slow The suggestion in regard to these three elements in nature

shows what evil was going to happen and this in particular about the river Godavari. The stream is spoken of earlier as a woman and friend to Sita whom she used to embrace day after day. This friend knew who had come and felt afraid. When Ravana took Sita by force and went away, darkness fell over the whole of creation which had lost its law. The wind did not blow and the sun became lustreless. The birds and beasts followed the track. The hills with their upraised peaks and the waters flowing down them looked as if they sorrowed for Sita abducted. The spirits of the trees shed tears and shook. Some of the suggestions are of course conceit but the general idea underlying the imputation of human emotion should have seemed to Valmiki not fallacious. The world *had* lost its law. Sita's pain was the world's pain and it was nothing beyond the reach of belief that the world should show that it was pained. In a body which is hurt a limb merely feels the pain, the eye shows that the body is hurt and the tongue cries out. So in nature a live creature may cry out, a tree may only shiver and a rock may stand without showing sign of pain, but nature in all is one and all of them are aware of the evil that has befallen. To the ordinary mind this may seem somewhat far fetched but to Valmiki the pain of tree and rock should have been real as the pain of any human creature. Valmiki it would seem had seen a bird shot and cried out in distress and discovered his faculty of poetry. We may well believe that such a man would feel one life in all creation. One particular instance of the imputation of human motive to a thing of nature by the



poet is of special interest When Rama left Ayodhya and had proceeded some distance the Thamasa was on his way It looked, says Valmiki, as if it stood in Rama's way, asking him not to go The Ganges, a much larger river, did not seem to the poet to do what the small stream the Thamasa, seemed to do We know that the Thamasa was Valmiki's river He lived on its bank and bathed in it and practised his austerities in the beautiful woods beside it It was when bathing in its limpid water one day that the incident of the huntsman shooting a Ciouncha occurred and poetry came to Valmiki The stream was very near to Valmiki's heart and was as it were a part of his being Valmiki may or may not have been in the crowds that followed Rama begging him not to go but he desired to indicate without mentioning himself that Rama's going was distasteful to him, and did this by suggesting that his river obstructed Rama When the Ramayana was first recited to audiences it was no doubt clear that the Thamasa, in objecting to Rama's departure, really represented Valmiki This would not have been clear to later generations but for the introductory *sargas* of the Ramayana which show the connection between Valmiki and this river For this fact, if for nothing else, we have to be grateful to the writer of the second *sarga* in the introduction

#### OTHER DESCRIPTION

The same skill appears in description of beauty other than nature's and of other things The description of woman's beauty where it occurs is perfect

even in single words and phrases. Where Ravana describes Sita this power appears at greater length. The description of the women lying in all kinds of poses in Ravana's sleeping apartments has a width and variousness which might give points to a director of modern pictures making films of glamorous girls. The poet describes with equal sureness of touch beauty fashioned by man's hands. A town a garden a palace an army or a procession is so described that the thing or event stands before the reader's eye built up almost to physical fact. Valmiki's descriptions of fights reach lengths which are really excessive. A good part of this description now found in the Ramayana should have been interpolation. Even so quite as good a part of it would have to be admitted as Valmiki's. In this as in other matters Valmiki became an example to later writers. We read the descriptions now and wonder that the poet thought them worthwhile. The poet himself had no doubt about it. He enjoyed describing a fight and no doubt those who heard his poem also enjoyed the description. In this he and his audience were like epic poets and their audiences everywhere else. Even to us there is on closer scrutiny some pleasure in the description of these fights. The picture of Kumbhakarna huge as a mountain peak and powerful stepping across the walls of Lanka and proceeding to the scene of battle and roaring so that the sea echoed with it of the *Vanara* hordes scattering in fear at the sight of this *Rakshasa* with the terrible eyes of Angada calling out to the leaders of his fleeing troops not to be cowards but turn back and fight this monster of an enemy of

the *Vanara* heroes pulling themselves together and gathering again and returning to the battle ground, carrying trees and boulders, and falling upon Kumbhakarna like angry elephants in the heat of youth, of Kumbhakarna remaining unmoved in spite of the attack with boulders brought from hill tops and whole trees with the flowers still on them, of the boulders breaking into pieces and the trees also breaking and lying on the ground, of Kumbhakarna incensed by the attack and falling upon the *Vanara* hordes and churning them as fire chuns a forest, of the *Vanara* leaders drenched with blood lying on the ground like so many trees with red flowers, of their followers losing heart and running from the fight, looking neither to the right hand nor to the left in a stampede, and getting up trees or falling into the sea this is one spirited description among a hundred. Like this description of a fight, Valmiki's description of a hermitage or of the atmosphere of forlorn love became examples for later poetry. Kalidasa's description of Kanva's hermitage beside the Malini shows signs of inspiration from Valmiki's description of the hermitage in which Sita met Anasuya. The description of the love-lorn Yaksha in the Cloud Messenger has echoes of Rama's grief in the woods beside the Pampa. There is nothing to wonder at in this. Valmiki knew all the movement and the speech, the laughter and the play of nature around him with the same fullness with which he saw them in life. There was no subject which he did not observe, nor detail which he did not record. He thus became a teacher for all who practised poetry in the centuries that succeeded.

## X SKHI OF NARRATION

### MANNER OF NARRATION

VALMIKI'S manner of narration is in keeping with the other great qualities of his poetry. It has been already stated that a certain grandeur of style appears when we reach the fifth *sarga* of the first book as we now have it where Valmiki's composition begins.

Of those to whom earlier than to any others this earth in entirety belonged are the first words of his narration. The sounds of these verses are long and euphonious and indicate a writer different from the one who was responsible for the first four *sargas*. When the poet has stated that the poem comes of the lineage of Ikshvaku he speaks of the prosperous and thickly populated land of Kosala situated on the banks of the Sarayu. Thereafter he describes Ayodhya. In this land of Kosala was the city of Ayodhya famous all over the world. This city was built by Manu Lord of all mankind himself. The description proceeds to say that this great town was ten *yojanas* and two wide that it had large roads well laid out that they were beautiful with scattered flowers and daily watering. With this description of Ayodhya this *sarga* ends. The next *sarga* begins with "Of this city of Ayodhya the king was Dasaratha learned in sacred lore far sighted valiant righteous and a royal sage." This whole *sarga* is devoted to eulogy of Dasaratha's rule. The next *sarga* describes the arrangements which had been made

for successful administration One next after begins "To this king so great, righteous and noble, and anxious to have a son, there was no issue to continue the line " The beauty of the beginning of these *saigas* is seen throughout the epic of Valmiki Each *saiga* takes up a topic and ends it The next *sarga* takes a connected topic and concludes it Thus these chapters are related to each other as paragraphs within an essay Just as, for orderly narration, the *saigas* deal with one topic, so for rousing the interest of the reader they very often end in a situation of suspense Very good examples of this are found in the part of the narrative dealing with the abduction of Sita One of these *saigas* ends stating that Maricha was seen in the guise of a golden deer moving in front of Rama's hermitage The last verse says "Seeing this animal of the hue of many jewels which she had never seen before Sita, daughter of Janaka, felt greatly interested " The next *saiga* "Seeing this animal beautiful with its sides of the colour of silver and gold, Sita of the faultless form and of the hue of burnished gold, greatly delighted, called out to her husband and for Lakshmana with his weapons " Rama pursued the golden deer to a great distance and shot it and, hearing Maricha's simulated cry, wondered how it would affect Sita and Lakshmana The *saiga* ends with these words "and he hurried and turned towards Janasthana " The next *saiga* begins with this statement "Hearing from the wood the sad cry which seemed to be like her husband's, Sita said to Lakshmana " The reader knows the plot that had been made and Rama, he sees, is returning to the

hermitage with a feeling of anxiety because of Maricha's simulation of his cry. He would rather that Rama came along to the hermitage quickly but the poet tells us what happened in the hermitage itself. There is a suggestion in the statement of Rama's thought that something absurd might happen in the hermitage. Immediately the poet takes up that thread and shows that it did happen. Kavana took Sita to Lanka and as she would not submit to his will kept her in his pleasure garden amidst a watch of his women. The *sarga* ends with this. Gripped in stupendous sorrow the daughter of Janaka full of fear like a dove caught in a net found not happiness. The *sarga* immediately after this begins to tell us what Rama did hastening to his hermitage after slaying Maricha. We are anxious to note how Sita was treated in her garden prison. The poet does not satisfy our curiosity there. He has other work to do and he begins it. If in consequence our anxiety regarding Sita is enhanced he is not displeased. He desires to rouse our sympathies for Sita and make us anxious for her welfare. When Hanuman was looking for Sita in Ravana's palace the poet tells us over and over again. Nowhere was Sita seen. Hanuman looked all over the dinner apartments. He did not find Sita. He looked for her in the sleeping apartments. He did not find her. So over a hundred verses the burden is thus that Sita was not seen. Such skill in narration has now become familiar by frequent use. It should have been new in Valmiki's time. He used it throughout his poem without the fear that it might seem mere mannerism. Within the

*sargas* themselves the story is full of detail and moves deliberately in a manner which made a critic of the past describe the Ramayana as a great river. In the progress of the narration the quality of a great river appears again and again. It is a full stream, broad as the Ganges, filling a wide bed and touching the bank on either side. So wide is the narration and so deliberate the movement that in places it looks as if the story does not move at all. It is as if a stream had come to a flat and even country and moved neither forward nor backward. This is particularly the case when the poet comes to his descriptions. The reader sometimes wonders whether Valmiki has forgotten that he is telling a story and is imagining that he is merely writing a description. In truth the poet has forgotten nothing. It is we that have forgotten we have forgotten that Valmiki is an epic poet, that the Ramayana is an epic poem. The poet's function here is to make any description that he undertakes complete. Just as a great river does indeed proceed to the sea at last, but is itself, at various points in its long journey, like to the sea wide and unmoving so this narration develops at points to spaciousness and self-sufficiency which seem unaware of further purpose. It is because the description or the story is so unhurried that the poet is able to give so many details both of what was and what occurred. The art of narration in this case follows the art of sculpture in Hoysala temples. The poet's object is not to tell the reader quickly what occurred. It is not enough for him to show Rama as great and use the narrative for doing this. This would be like making

a beautiful image and placing it in some kind of building. The hero is undoubtedly great but the poet desires to place him in a structure which is also great. The temple has to be made worthy of the image and its walls are sculptured with a thousand figures each beautiful and almost as worthy of being looked at as the central image. On every square inch of the structure we see the same workmanship which created the beauty of the temple's deity. In making a narrative worthy of the hero the poet has given up all inclination for speed. The reader who wishes to get the best from the poet has similarly to give up all thought of speed in reading. The way to enjoy this story is to read it in small sections day after day without haste without rest. This in fact is the manner prescribed for the reading of the Ramayana in Indian households and followed in public recitals. It is when we read the poem in this unhurried way that we see how beautiful is the workmanship in every detail of the narration and the description and get the best out of it.

#### DETAIL IN POETRY

Examples have appeared of the kind of detail with which Valmiki fills his work as when Kowsalya asks Rama to have some food. Some others may be mentioned. Rama in offering oblations to the dead sat on the ground to perform the ceremony. The cloth he wore had marks of the dust on which he sat. When he came and prostrated to his mothers after the ceremony they flicked the dust off the cloth. Between Rama taking leave of Bharata and the arrival of



Surpanakha there was a long interval of years. Ordinarily a narrative of this kind would not say where and how this period was spent. In this poem, however, we are told that Rama with his wife and brother spent so many months in such and such a place and so many in another and altogether about ten years by the time they began to live in Janasthana. Maricha, we know, came in the guise of a deer and moved about in front of Rama's hermitage. There were other animals near about and he moved amidst them. The poet tells us that those animals smelt this counterfeit and seeing that it was not really an animal moved away. The *Vanara* heroes who came to Ayodhya with Rama joined the coronation procession sitting on elephants. The poet tells us that in doing this they assumed the shape of men. We may imagine that they wore apparel of the sort that Ayodhya would have considered normal. Details of this kind give a finish to the story. Their absence would not leave any feeling of incompleteness but their presence shows how full is the poet's vision. If the details were not there no one would say that they were lacking. Yet each in its place brings to the narrative or description a grace which nothing else could have secured.

#### TRAGIC IRONY

(A special feature of Valmiki's skill in narration is the frequency with which the story exposes man's helplessness in the grip of circumstance. It has been stated that Dasaratha tried to install Rama as Yuvaraja in Bharata's absence with a view to avoid trouble. When Kaikeyi asked him for two boons he

promised in the name of the son he loved that he would drive that very son to exile only he did not know he was doing so Sita assured Rama that he would have no trouble in the forest on her account The only thing which troubled Rama in the years of exile was anxiety for this wife and all the tribulation that came to him was the outcome of her being with him When Ravana came to Sita he asked her 'Who are you lady and why are you alone here?' This place is full of *Rakshasas* wicked men who come in disguises Ravana consciously or unconsciously was describing himself We are told also that the *Rakshasa* king entered the hermitage making *Brahmaghosha* or calling on the sacred name He could not have been either the first or the last of persons appearing to be ascetics and chanting the sacred text harbouring all the time an evil design within Valmiki should have seen many such persons Sita told Lakshmana that any desire on his part to own her in the event of Rama coming to harm would be fruitless

I shall give up my life rather than touch a man other than Rama with my foot In less than an hour after saying this she was sitting on Ravana's lap She did not do this willingly it is true but it was also true that her body did touch the body of a person other than Rama Sita praises Rama to Hanuman as a man who remembered affection and whose speech was sweet Victorious against Ravana this husband of hers who remembered affection forgot all the affection that she had lavished on him His tongue which she described as uttering sweet words uttered words that hurt her like daggers She had said that

happiness would come to a man at least at the end of a hundred years provided he lived. Life, she thought, was so worthwhile and yet when she heard the words uttered by Rama she felt that death was her only refuge. Life was unbearable and she wished to enter fire. Kaikeyi asked for kingship for her son and exile for Rama and was granted her requests. What she got actually was exile for her son and kingship for Rama's footwear. Bharata did not enter Ayodhya until Rama returned. He stayed beyond the town an exile from the home of his fathers, for the whole period of Rama's absence, and ruled but as Rama's servant. Often does life take tortuous courses, men working hard for their own suffering and ruin and uttering words which are soon proved false. The discrepancy between intention and occurrence and desire and fulfilment is the essence of tragedy in life. In moments like this the impression is produced of a power behind the veil which is laughing at the actors on the stage it has set. 'Life is a play house of Fate's Chamberlain'. We, the actors in the company, frequently forget its owner and manager. The poet seems to smile a little, seeing man in this fashion. While smiling a little, he greatly pities man. Valmiki had reached the state of equanimity prescribed for the wise, but retained enough of humanity to sympathise with those who had not reached that height of peace.

#### COMPREHENSIVE POETRY

'Speaking of Valmiki's skill in narration we are thus led to speak of his pity for mankind and his

knowledge of life. That skill in narration is so closely dependent on that pity and the knowledge which was the basis of the pity. The poet had seen all of life and his heart had melted at the sight. That was how he knew as by instinct what to say and how to say it if he should move the heart of his fellowmen. His time did not know the abstract discussion of poetry which came into being later and which described how a poem should be written and what things it should say. Neither the poet nor the hearers had any standard outside themselves to satisfy but all types of experience constituting life were subjects for poetry in Valmiki. Rhetoricians later classified such experience into nine types and all are seen in the Ramayana. Important among them is the emotion of love. In the life of Rama and Sita in the palace and in the forest and in the description of their separation and grief beside the lake of Pampa and in the pleasure garden of Ravana the poet has given pictures of love pure and beautiful and unspoilt by sophistication. In later poetry in Sanskrit a certain manner of treating love became common artificial art striving after new ways in order to impress. Love however is neither artificial nor does it require ways newly devised. Like the breath and the light by which we live it is present in pristine form in the life men live to day as in the life they lived in the past. One realises this in reading Valmiki's poetry. Never once does the love in the poem appear in turbid description. The attraction between male and female is primeval here as in nature. The wise in life take note of it and conduct themselves in it with decency and poetry deals

best with the emotion when it keeps the expression of it within those same limits. Another important type of experience in poetry comes from the delineation of heroism. There is no lack of heroic enterprise in the story of Rama. In the early pictures of his vanquishing Thataka, Maricha and Subahu and the later ones of slaying the *Rakshasa* hoides stationed in Janasthana, and in the elaborate description of the exploits of Rama and Lakshmana, Sugriva and Hanuman, and Meganada and Ravana, in the *Yuddha Kanda* we have delineation of heroism out-topping sublimity. Pity is another emotional experience through which poetry has to lead its votaries. Of this, as has been already stated, there is abundance in Valmiki. Terror and disgust occur in the situations in which Rama, Sita and Lakshmana met strange beings in the early years of their stay in the forest and in the description of the guard that Ravana set over Sita. One might think that this poet who is so successful with the serious elements in life might not do as well with humour. Yet room has been found in the Ramayana for genuine and healthy laughter. When Dasaratha performed the sacrifice and fed large numbers of people the leaders among those who enjoyed the dinner praised the food as having the proper taste and prepared in the right way. These leaders the poet describes as "*dwiṇaiśhabha*", eminent among Brahmins like bulls. The idiom is common enough in describing eminence in a class but it seems to have special significance in this context of ability to get outside succulent feed. As many people were engaged in many parts of the sacrificial ground

various persons valiant and full of words spoke discourses on cause and effect endeavouring to overcome one another. Valiant and full of words seems to glance at the courage of these votaries of discussion in talk. It looks also as if the poet had no great opinion of the doctrines of cause and effect. Without doubt the devotees of verbal heroics in discussion would have thought this man's poetry light fare if not frivolous. Valmiki in this passage has given us a vignette of the exponents of controversy free from unfriendliness and with a casual smile. Mandhara is described in the poem as a dwarf. When she teaches Kaikeyi how to encompass her desire to drive out Rama and make Bharata king the queen expresses deep appreciation of her cleverness and describes her person eyes face nose and waist. The young man who married Mandhara could not have eulogized her grace with more warmth and in greater detail. Kaikeyi tells Mandhara that of all the dwarfs in the world she was the most beautiful. The queen said this in good faith but to those who heard the poem recited as to us to day Mandhara's beauty should in truth have seemed dwarf beauty. This no doubt was the intention of the poet. When Maricha told Ravana to give up the idea of abducting Sita Ravana grew wrathful and told him that if Maricha did not comply with his command he would kill him. Maricha said in reply that he would go upon the enterprise but warned Ravana that this would bring harm to him and that he too would come to grief. He added Many are the innocent who have come to harm through others offence. Now I am coming

to him because of your offence" The innocent of whom Maricha was speaking should have been worthy and righteous Maricha describes himself as a worthy and righteous person Bharata in his journey to bring back Rama, (a passage, however, suspected to be an interpolation), stayed in Bharadwaja's hermitage and enjoyed the sage's hospitality The army which accompanied Bharata was so delighted with the entertainment that it was unwilling to go either forward to Rama or back to Ayodhya The army had been given fine drink and had heavenly nymphs for companions No wonder that it felt no inclination for duty When Angada and his companions were wandering on this side of the sea, Angada saw under a tree a fierce-looking person deep in meditation, and immediately made up his mind that it should be Ravana and fisted him on his head and killed him Receiving news of this the *Vanaras* went and saw the person who had been killed and decided that it was not Ravana When Maricha moved up and down in front of Rama's hermitage amidst other animals they came near him thinking that it was also an animal We are told that he longed to eat them but from fear that his disguise would be exposed he controlled his inclination The poor fellow who had come to die of Rama's arrow would have had an easy dinner before dying, but circumstances denied him the pleasure

#### STORE OF WORDS

"It is hardly necessary to say that for the purposes of so expansive a story and such varied descriptions

the poet needed and possessed an extensive store of words and great powers of composition. Valmiki's store of words is like the ocean's store of waters. It knows no limit. Whether he is describing a town or a house or a river or a hill or forest or country the poet has an abundant vocabulary at his disposal. When he begins describing a wood the names of the trees come in unwearied succession to the length of eight or ten verses. The same facility appears in the naming of birds. To recognise the trees and birds named by Valmiki we should now have doctors of Botany and Ornithology. It is possible that even then all the trees and birds may not be identified. Along with such plenty the poet possessed a sense of fitness of words. Companion in the practice of *dharma*

the hero of the red under lip    the hero of the broad chest    she of the bright smile    he who strove for truth    these are instances of single compounds describing individuals. Each is particularly suitable in the context and though often appearing grotesque in translation particularly in maladroit translation makes manifest the quality of the person described. The beauty of the words is as notable as their plentifulness and their fitness. Ravana saw Maricha's hermitage in a forest which was secluded beautiful and clean. *Dadarsa asramaṁ śkantiṁ ramyaṁ puṇyaṁ anantare*. Rama traversed the width of Kosala on his way to the forest. *Isalan Kosalan ramāṁ yathā Lakṣmīnaṁ ajah*. The long vowels seem to indicate the expanse of the country. The description of the Kosala land is equally beautiful but the beauty of words is unfortunately not to be brought out



in a rendering In a verse describing the descent of the Ganges (presuming that this portion is not an interpolation) the poet gives in a half verse anamato-pœa at its best Numerous are the passages like the description of the Ganges, as Rama, Sita and Lakshmana saw it on their way to the forest, and of the sea as Rama with the *Vanara* hordes reached it, or of Lanka as he and Lakshmana saw it, where beautiful as the meaning may be, the words are even more beautiful To take examples of beauty of language from a poem of the extent of the Ramayana would in any case be difficult It is impossible when it is to be done through a translation But this may be said to be true merely to examine the beauty of Valmiki's style a thesis would be necessary 'So ingenuous and clear is the expression, so natural and unsophisticated is its beauty so winsome and gracious is the manner' 'Sanskrit later developed a style full of sound and fury and, depending upon a grammar whose tentacles touched every word, perpetrated sentences in which the noun and the adjective which qualified it would be ten words apart and those words quite unconnected with that noun or that adjective' It developed a habit also of making compound words of almost any length, the meaning of which could be recovered only after much patient unravelling The effect of these developments can be seen even in 'Kalidasa who among all later writers was the nearest in feeling and expression to Valmiki' In Valmiki, however, we see none of this stiffness or far-flung uncouthness The words come as the meaning might come when a person is talking, and adjective and noun

and verb come out each in its own right. While in later style one inflectional ending had to do duty with a whole series of connected words in Valmiki each word comes with its own inflections. (As in a prosperous household every child however small might have its clothes horse and desk and books and writing materials so in Valmiki the smallest of words appears fully equipped and self possessed.)

### SIMILE AND OTHER FIGURES OF SPEECH

(A thing of the utmost beauty in Valmiki is the simile.) A simile reduced to its elements is nothing more than a statement that one thing is like another. 'The eyes are like the lotus the face is like the moon and the sky with its stars is like the lake with its flowers. Similes of this kind occur in the Ramayan in endless profusion. The beauty of the simile as a figure of speech does not however lie in the statement of such obvious or fancied similarity at a single point. Where a situation is described as similar to another situation the reader sees something that is not too obvious and reacts to the comparison with a greater feeling of delight. This delight is in proportion to the number of points over which the similarity is indicated the extent to which the situations compared are unlike each other and the importance of the context in which the simile is called in by way of illustration. Simile of this kind in important situations pointing out similarity over many points and between things ordinarily unconnected with each other appears easily and abundantly in Valmiki. The poet describes Kowsalya as she approaches Rama as looking

like a mare approaching its young one. When Rama has gone away and Kowsalya is in sorrow Valmiki describes her as being like the cow which sees not its calf. Pride of motherhood and self-conscious grace of approach are suggested in the first case, the exceeding love that weeps and will not be comforted in the second case. Sumitra when assuring Kowsalya that Rama would return and bend in reverence to her and she would drop tears of happiness on him says that this would be like a great cloud dropping showers on a hill. The picture of Rama bending to the mother as a hill under a cloud, reverent and humble but in itself unshaken and unmoved, and of the mother as a cloud which envelopes and is agitated and is dropping showers, is of remarkable beauty. Hearing Sumitra's words of comfort Kowsalya became, we are told, like a cloud of autumn which has little water left. The mother has wept sufficiently and has almost ceased. What remains of her is only some more tears. It remains unmelted lest she should die. When Kaikeyi objects to a large entourage and wealth following Rama to the forest, she says that her son should not be given a kingdom empty of people and wealth like a drink whose essence has been drunk. When Rama started for the forest, the women of Ayodhya looking at him from the roofs of their houses shed a few tears. The poet tells us that this was like the lotus in a lake shedding a few drops of water when a crab within the pool presses their stock. The women did not cry freely. To do so when parting with any one is inauspicious. They should, properly speaking not have shed any tears at all. But the sorrow that

oppressed their hearts craved their lotus like eyes to drop tear. When Sita was shown the hempen cloth to wear for life in exile she looked at it we are told a deer looks at a net. The deer's eyes are naturally large and innocent. Looking at a net they fill with fear and become larger. So the poet would tell us to look at Sita seeing a symbol of what was coming to her. The course net like hempen robe was indeed a symbol of the confinement in which that exile was to end for Rama's wife. Ravana in the sky with Sita on his lap looked the poet tells us like a great cloud streaked with lightning or as a well wooded hill with a zigzag line of forest fire. These similes are excellent even as pictures but they fulfil themselves by the suggestion of what was going to happen to Ravana. The cloud does not grasp lightning for property nor is a zigzag line of fire an auspicious portent for a well wooded hill. Ravana's fate was to dissolve as such a cloud will or be destroyed with all that was his as that hill will be destroyed. Krishna coming to Sita when neither Rama nor Lakshmana was there to guard her is described as Rahu coming to evening when there is neither sun nor moon to protect her. When Ravana speaks boastfully of his valour compared to Rama Sita tells him that the comparison was absurd. Ravana was not equal to standing in the neighbourhood of Rama let alone facing him and fighting him as a dog to standing in the neighbourhood of a tiger. The dog is frisking and frolicking with his master in a wood and making short trips away from him and back all the time but at particular points in the journey he keeps close to

the heels of his master. Inquiry in such a case shows that the dog is stilled by the smell of a tiger which should have crossed the path on that point. The dog does not need to see the tiger to be afraid nor need the tiger have passed across its path recently. Any thin remnant of its track in the air is sufficient to quell the dog's playfulness. Sita's reference to the cowardice which made Ravana come to her in Rama's absence could not have been made more contemptuous. Ravana coming to Sita with all his decorations was unattractive, it would seem, like a temple in the cremation ground. A cruel ruler, we are told, is like fire in the cremation ground, unhelpful to his subjects. Men fear him, but can get nothing from him. No one warms his body in fire in the cremation ground nor lights his lamp nor cooks his food with it. Sita consigned to Ravana's pleasure garden was the poet tells us, in the position of a good word consigned to low meaning. A man should not make room in his mind for sorrow. Whoever does it will be swallowed up in it as a ship which allows the water to leak in. Hanuman, offering to carry Sita on his back and hand her over to Rama, compares the enterprise to the act of fire conveying an oblation to the Lord of the Gods. An oblation in itself is consecrated offering pure, unsullied. Fire, similarly, is pure and, what is more, purifies by its touch. The oblation by coming into contact with it gains in consecration and loses nothing. Fire never fails in its task of conveying an oblation to the God from whom it is intended. He is a close friend as well as servant of the Lord of the Gods. The simile describing Rama as

the Lord of the Gods and Sita as the oblation and Hanuman as the God of Fire who conveys to Indra what is meant for him is perfect in every detail. The water which was falling from a ledge of rock in Ravana's pleasure garden seemed like a young woman whose character her husband suspects and pushes away from his lap. The violence of the fall suggests the disgust with which the husband pushes away his faithless wife. It suggests also that once so thrown the woman has no chance of sitting in the same lap again as before. The water which thus dropped down moved in a channel and because of the banks on both sides hesitated a little and turned back. This seemed the poet tells us like the case of the woman whom her friends advise to be patient and see if she cannot get reconciled to her master. Sita put a garland of pearls on Hanuman. The *Vanara* of golden hue wearing a white cloth and this garland over it looked the poet tells us like the mount of Meru clothed with moon light and garlanded with the stars. The young women in Ravana's harem lying asleep after a night of dissipation looked like young mares which had been ridden hard. The action of the water in a river bed lapping its sandy margin looked it would seem like young love discovering its charms to the lover with half reluctant shyness. When Ravana heard of his son's death he flamed up in wrath and shed tears. The tears looked it would seem like drops of oil falling from a huge flame in an oil lamp. The meaning of the simile is clear only if we know that the drop of oil is burning while it is falling. Ravana's tears burned with his wrath as such a drop of oil

might As each drop of oil in such a case is a globe of fire, so each tear drop was a globule of Ravana's wrath Ravana could not act improperly towards Sita, the poet tells us, as the sea cannot over-reach its shore So one can go on with these similes from Valmiki's poem They are endless and as various They come from all the expanse of life Often they are themselves excellent pictures Quite as often their effect is heightened by a power of suggestion which is marvellously far-glancing Homer's similes are famous in literary discussion in the West They are great and worthy of all praise For other qualities Valmiki's similes deserve to be as famous In literary discussion in India Kalidasa is held to be the paragon of simile-makers This admiration of Kalidasa's simile is quite justified but we have to remember that he was nourished in his poetic life by Valmiki Rhetoric in India as elsewhere has classified skill in speech and called them by various names as figures of speech Valmiki wrote before rhetoricians came into existence Though he did not write to satisfy rules of composition we find in Valmiki's poem all the figures of speech which rhetoric later recognised There is a story that Kalidasa was studying the Ramayana and noted the figures of speech which he came across At one point of the study he said to himself that all the beauties of good composition had occurred in what he had read except one This one was what is known as "*Anvaya*" It consists in comparing a thing to itself because there is nothing else to compare with it He wondered why this particular figure of speech had not occurred in

Valmiki's composition That night Valmiki came to him in his dream and said Do not be impatient read on and you will find what you want Kalidasa found the next day the passage in the sixth book in which Valmiki likens the battle between Rama and Ravana to itself even as he would liken the sea only to the sea and the sky only to the sky Kalidasa the story tells us was happy that his master had completed the whole gamut of skill in utterance He also realised that it was wrong to think that any quality of great composition could be lacking in his master's work Valmiki undertook an extensive story He undertook a very detailed narration He dealt with six thousand matters and wrote we know not how many thousand verses No wonder that in a narrative of such length and detailed workmanship we should find instances of all the skill of which rhetoric is aware Indeed rhetoric would not know many of the nuances of expression if it did not have Valmiki before it

#### PICTURE AND STATUE

Before leaving the subject of Valmiki's similes it seems necessary to draw attention to the fact that most of these similes make word pictures a forest on a hill which the fire is consuming a dark cloud split by zigzag lightning a great lamp with a thick wick from which drops of oil fall burning full-blown lotuses from which fall drops of water like tears from a beautiful eye a hill and a cloud bending over it like a mother over her grown up on doing reverence a deer which has seen a net and is afraid These are



might As each drop of oil in such a case is a globe of fire, so each tear drop was a globule of Ravana's wrath Ravana could not act improperly towards Sita, the poet tells us, as the sea cannot over-reach its shore So one can go on with these similes from Valmiki's poem They are endless and as various They come from all the expanse of life Often they are themselves excellent pictures Quite as often their effect is heightened by a power of suggestion which is marvellously far-glancing Homer's similes are famous in literary discussion in the West They are great and worthy of all praise For other qualities Valmiki's similes deserve to be as famous In literary discussion in India Kalidasa is held to be the paragon of simile-makers This admiration of Kalidasa's simile is quite justified but we have to remember that he was nourished in his poetic life by Valmiki Rhetoric in India as elsewhere has classified skill in speech and called them by various names as figures of speech Valmiki wrote before rhetoricians came into existence Though he did not write to satisfy rules of composition we find in Valmiki's poem all the figures of speech which rhetoric later recognised There is a story that Kalidasa was studying the Ramayana and noted the figures of speech which he came across At one point of the study he said to himself that all the beauties of good composition had occurred in what he had read except one This one was what is known as "*Anvaya*" It consists in comparing a thing to itself because there is nothing else to compare with it He wondered why this particular figure of speech had not occurred in

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pictures which come before us in Valmiki's similes. The beauty of these pictures is transferred to the situations to which they are compared and we delight in the details of the situations thus suggested. Valmiki sometimes makes these pictures by enumeration of detail. His description of winter or of the rainy season follows this method. To read Valmiki's description of winter is like sitting at a window and watching the season at various points of its progress at various hours of the day and the night and in various places. What we have in consequence is not so much a picture as a picture gallery. Each place, each hour, at each stage of the season is marked off clearly in a few strokes, and each comes before our vision. The poet has also used when necessary the device of sketching a figure to tell his story. When Sumantra returned to the palace after leaving Rama, Sita and Lakshmana, on the bank of the Ganges and Dasaratha asked him what Rama had said, Lakshmana had said and Sita had said, Sumantra answered "Rama said so and so, Lakshmana said so and so, and Sita said nothing but stood looking at Ayodhya with tears in her eyes." The words that Rama said and the words that Lakshmana said make the reader feel the pity of it all. They are successful as words but the nothing that Sita said and the picture of her as she stood on the borders of Kosala, looking at Ayodhya and weeping, convey far more than the speech of her husband and her brother-in-law. O the pity of it! Ayodhya was to the princess the scene of her happiest days. Happy too had been the days of her life in her father's house. In the years that she had passed

since her birth Sita had seen happiness unalloyed by anxiety undiminished by suffering. She was to know such happiness no more. She had walked to its boundary. Later life brought her happiness but that came along with pain. The innocent and unsullied pleasure of early years could never again be hers. Sita standing on the bank of the Ganges and looking at Nodhwa with tears in her eyes is a symbol of life destined to suffering with its back to the sorrow to which it must progress its face to the joy which it owns no more. Here is silence more eloquent than speech. The white of the background brighter than the colour of the painting. This is description which has passed the stage of painting in word. It is statuary in words. Solid as marble.

## XI CIVILISATION AND CULTURE

### IDEAL OF LIFE

- 1 THE narrative of the Ramayana emphasizes an ideal of culture which Valmiki should have cherished.
- 2 Culture is of worth as shaping character and an essential part of character lies in the behaviour of man and woman as man and woman. There are five or six incidents in the Ramayana which suggest Valmiki's view in this matter. Two of them namely the story of Ahalya and Viswamitra seem to be interpolation in this poem but the idea of good conduct underlying them underlies the narration which is clearly Valmiki's. Viswamitra determined on austerities in order to

obtain the power with which to vanquish Vasishtha. His self-control was great enough to bring him the approval of the Gods as a royal sage. He could send a human in his earthly body to heaven, he could save a youngster destined to be victim in a sacrifice from the sacred fire, he could even shed the adjective royal and become a sage. He desired, however, to be a Brahma sage and persisted in the life of self-control. At this stage one day he saw in the pond beside his hermitage a nymph of heaven sent by the Gods to tempt him. All his self-control went to the winds and he said to her, "Beautiful one, I offer you welcome. Stay in my hermitage and be gracious to me smitten with desire." The nymph accepted the invitation and the sage lived with her for twenty-five years. Then he felt ashamed of having yielded to desire. He realised too that Menaka's coming to him was in pursuance of a plot by the Gods to make him fail. Menaka was afraid lest he should curse her but the sage was mindful of the delight of the years he had spent with her and took leave of her in kindly words and went away for further austerities. This is one story. Like this son of Gadhi a man may be a hero ruling over a kingdom, he may practise austerities for a thousand years, he may become a sage among kings, he may even become a sage without that limitation of spheres. Yet when he sees a beautiful woman his mind may be moved and desire may awaken. It cannot be said that Viswamitra tried to control his desire, that it proved stronger than his control, and that in consequence he yielded to it. To this man who had become a sage the desire to

control desire had not come. He offered welcome to the heavenly nymph. In fact the welcome was not so much to the nymph as to his desire. We may speak of conquering desire or being vanquished by desire when there is an impulse to withstand it. But in fact man even after years of austerities offers a welcome to desire when it awakens and becomes too willingly its slave. Viswamitra took years to realise that he ought not to have yielded to Menaka's charms. The sage had again to see a heavenly beauty sent by the Gods. Rambha feared him and was reluctant to try him but the King of the Gods reassured her and sent her on the errand. It was spring time in the woods and the voice of the cuckoo was melodious to the ear. Viswamitra opened his eyes and saw before him this heavenly nymph of incomparable beauty. This time however he did not fall a victim. He waxed wroth at her wish to tempt him and cursed her and moved to another spot to continue his austerities. There was no further trial of him in this direction. There was a further trial but that related to love of food. For years he practised meditation fasting for six months at a time and taking but one meal at the end of each such period. After one such half year of fast he was sitting before his meal when a beggar called out near his door asking for food. Viswamitra was bound to satisfy the beggar before he could eat himself. He gave up his meal to the beggar and sat down to meditation again. It was after this that the Gods admitted that he had conquered all his inclinations and conferred on him the title of Brahma Rishi. If a man considers the

pleasure of the senses worthwhile it is not possible to say when his desire may become his chain. A person who would grow should know that the desires of the senses are obstacles to the emancipation of his spirit. Only then will he make an effort to be free of desire. The same lesson comes out in the story of Ahalya from the point of view of woman. Goutama was a great sage, but Ahalya was not content with being the wife of a sage, however great. Once when Goutama was not in the hermitage India came to her. Appearing in the form of her husband he asked her to be his. Ahalya knew that it was India yet because of an inclination for the king of the Gods she gave herself to him. "I am grateful to you great one" she said. "Depart from hence without delay and always protect both yourself and me." To the unfaithful wife she and her lover are one, the husband is a person apart. Ahalya felt honoured by Indra's love of her. India wore the form of Goutama but Ahalya wanted him on his own account. The king of the Gods wore her husband's form not for her or his sake but to deceive others who might see him. There could be no more complete picture of how the marital relationship is ruined where the minds of husband and wife do not mingle. The wife in such a case is not the companion for weal and woe that Sita was to her husband. She has a life of her own and wishes to have it. She feels honoured when a stranger makes love to her. As Indra left the hermitage Goutama came in and, seeing how matters stood, he decreed punishment both to India and Ahalya. The narrator here seems to say that the

offence against marital faith does not begin when the stranger comes and is accepted. The stranger can come and express his desire in words only if he has expressed it in looks much earlier and feels that his attentions are welcome. Not in yielding to desire is the real joy of life nor is the good of society founded on such yielding. Lakshmana who could have the wife he loved but chose to go and serve an elder brother and his wife in the wilderness. Rama who could reject a beautiful woman even when she came and begged to be taken. Sita who spurned the advances of the ruler of Lanka and told him that if he persisted he would be working his own ruin. Hanuman who saw hundreds of beautiful women half clad and asleep in Rama's harem without feeling any interest in their personal charm. These are examples of the good life. It is not that the good feel no desire nor that their mind does not flow in curiosity but their goodness stands firm over the desire and the curiosity. Lakshmana saw his sister-in-law's feet he did not see for more than a moment her arm or her ear for to see was not the part of a good brother. Sita looked on him with the love of a sister-in-law. He was a man like Rama. As Rama had taken her hand and Lakshmana had taken Urmila's. Rama under other conditions might have taken Urmila's hand and Lakshmana Sita's. The sister-in-law knew this but Rama had taken her hand and was therefore her man. Lakshmana was not the man that had taken her hand he was not a man to her. It was because Sita knew that he might have been her husband but in consequence of the dispositions made by life was not



that in an hour of intense emotion she told him that he was after her but she would not be his. Thought like this, to become speech in a moment of great emotional stress, should have been present in the mind earlier, but kept down by reason. Sita did not believe what she was saying of Lakshmana, but previously it should have occurred to her as possible in human nature, and she should have said to herself how fortunate it was that Lakshmana was not that kind of man, and possibly accused herself for having had such a thought about so pure-minded a brother-in-law. It is, however, not possible to a person to prevent such thought coming to the mind. A man may be a celibate. He may not entertain impure thoughts but he should beware of them. Even Rama's wife should fear what the world will think if she touched a stranger like Hanuman though it was not possible that she could desire him. Sita may be ever so pure, and Rama may know her as such with ever so much certitude; yet when he released her from her prison in Lanka, Rama felt some anger about her having put herself in the power of a stranger. He could not help saying a small word about her. 'Valmiki seems to suggest that men should fear the opinion of other people quite as much as their own conscience. He seems also to suggest that to feel and speak small in Rama's position is inevitable in human nature. The husband may persuade himself and the world that the smallness was apparent and dictated by the wife's interests but what makes the words possible is the possibility of suspicion in his nature, just the trace of meanness inevitable in the possessing male mind even at its best.

Sita could not have given her mind to a stranger but what if that stranger possessed her body by force? How was it to be demonstrated to the world that this was not possible? The answer was that in such a situation Sita would have given up her life rather than yield. Was this certain? Could Sita for honour have given up her life? Rama knew that she could but it was necessary for the world also to know. He got it proved to the world and in doing it he proved to himself what he knew was truth. Man and wife are not faithful to each other merely for their own satisfaction. The world has joined them together and has told them that they two are one and they have promised to the world that they are man and wife and will live as one. It is necessary for them to be sure that they have kept the promise but it is no less necessary to prove it to the world also.

### CONTROL OF DESIRE

The main point of all this is that a man is human because he has desires and that he retains humanity by conquest of desire. Valmiki has no praise for a state in which man has no desire. He worships the nature which knows desire but keeps it in leash. Control and purity in such a case relate to the mind. One's word in a moment of agitation may pass the boundary between right speech and wrong. Sita spoke such words to Lakshmana. When a stranger acts improperly a woman's body may come into contact with his body. Sita against her will came to sit on Ravana's lap. Yet such word and such contact had not touched the mind. Willingly and with

desire, no woman or man should touch a stranger. When Hanuman offered to carry Sita to her husband she told him that she would not voluntarily touch a man other than her husband. When Rama addressed cruel words to her Sita explained this to him. Her mind had never moved from love of Rama. It had not gone to the love of any other person. Her heart was hers, her mind was hers, these no one could take without her consent. Her body she could not protect in the same way. If some one touched it by force the fault was in fate, not in her. The contact with another's body had not occurred by her consent. Purity of conduct, Valmiki seems to say, is of the mind and heart, not of the body. This principle can be applied to circumstances other than those in the story. Ravana when all was said and done was a decent fellow. He knew, besides, the real joy of life with women. For these reasons and also because he feared the consequences of a curse, he desisted from violence to Sita. In another situation a ruffian may behave differently and outrage a woman, taking her body against her will. So long as the mind and the heart of the woman reject the man so long will her purity suffer no diminution. The real fault in a woman is that of which Ahalya was guilty, giving the mind, losing the heart. A woman who has done this may in consequence give her body also, she may for want of opportunity not give it. But the mere failure to give the body will not leave her conduct pure. That conduct has become impure the moment the mind has been given. Man's soul owns the mind and the body. It has to keep both pure. On the body however,

its sway is incomplete on the mind that sway is full. If by circumstances beyond control a man's body fails but the mind is pure then his conduct continues to be pure. By Ravana's touch of her body by force Sita did not become impure. By Hanuman being obliged to look at the half-naked beauties of Ravana's harem his celibacy did not suffer loss.

### CIVIC LIFE

This conception of purity indicates the height of human civilization envisaged by Valmiki. Civilization means largely the wakefulness of a people its progress in life. Signs of a people's civilization will therefore appear in every part of its life. But the great symbol of all wakefulness and progress in a people is the city. The creation of a city implies a desire for life in the aggregate a power in the population to prescribe the laws and rules of gregarious life a capacity to employ the advantages flowing from such life to make of living something gracious. In real civic life each man has a contribution to make to the life of society and there is a way in which he has to make it. Each man should know what is the way of his contribution. The Ramayana give elaborate pictures of a beautiful civic life. It does not look as if there were many cities in the days of the Ramayana. In all likelihood there was a city only where there was a king the population gathering around the palace. Even now in this country the number of cities is very small. In one of the languages of South India the word for city means palace. What was called kingdom in the days of the Ramayana may even have been no



service had earned the freedom to join in a discussion of the King's domestic affairs. A minister was not a paid officer. The preceptor was an ascetic living in a hermitage in the woods. His life was a life of poverty. The wealth of the palace was ready to flow into his cottage in the woods. That readiness was enough to the preceptor. He did not allow it so to flow. He as well as the king and the people seem then to have known that wealth is not necessarily material but could be spiritual. As money and grain were wealth of the body, so self denial and righteousness were wealth of the spirit. They did not hold that all worthy men should have wealth or that man's worth could be measured by his material possessions. They recognised the difference in status between a king and his servant but that difference did not become a gulf between their lives. The king treated his charioteer as a friend. The charioteer did not forget the respect due from him to his master but at the same time did not humble himself too much. When the king wished to install his eldest son as Yuvaraja he asked for the consent of the people and they gave him the consent. He knew that his son was very good but gave him advice as to how he should conduct himself in power which shows the high conception of kingly duty that was current when the poem was written. When the king's eldest son went away to the forest and the king died the elders of the people, the ministers and the preceptors of the royal household gathered together and decided how they should proceed further. The poet at this point makes the people say what great harm arises

them singing buds, and birds which did not sing but were pretty to look at, animals brought alive and kept in their enclosures or stuffed skins of other animals which delighted the eye. The kings and princes wore costly apparel and ornaments of gold. Not only in Ayodhya but in Lanka also there was wealth which moved the poet to enthusiasm and admiration.

#### KINGDOM AND COUNCIL HALL

Material prosperity is the body of civilization. Organization is necessary to ensure its continuance. The organization of which we have indications in the Ramayana had features which were in accord with the advanced state of the material prosperity of Ayodhya. Dasaratha seems to have been the principal chieftain of his time. He had many feudal chiefs under his suzerainty. Janaka and Kekaya and others like them seem to have been kings of nearly equal status, but all honoured the kings of the line of Ikshvaku as principal among them. Guha, the king of a forest people, was a friend to Dasaratha. The Emperor's organization did not reach as far as the forest of Dandaka. Yet even that part of the country belonged to him sufficiently to make the sages dwelling there expect protection from the King's son when he came there as an exile, and to make that son agree that it was his duty to give that protection. The King had a number of ministers. The chief among them was the religious preceptor Vasishta. The preceptors and the ministers came to their positions by heredity. Among the advisers of the King were aged servants of the state, who, by years of

service had earned the freedom to join in a discussion of the King's domestic affairs. A minister was not a paid officer. The preceptor was in ascetic living in a hermitage in the woods. His life was a life of poverty. The wealth of the palace was ready to flow into his cottage in the woods. That readiness was enough to the preceptor. He did not allow it so to flow. He as well as the king and the people seem then to have known that wealth is not necessarily material but could be spiritual. As money and grain were wealth of the body, so self denial and righteousness were wealth of the spirit. They did not hold that all worthy men should have wealth or that man's worth could be measured by his material possessions. They recognised the difference in status between a king and his servant but that difference did not become a gulf between their lives. The King treated his charioteer as a friend. The charioteer did not forget the respect due from him to his master but at the same time did not humble himself too much. When the King wished to install his eldest son as Yuvaraja he asked for the consent of the people and they gave him the consent. He knew that his son was very good but gave him advice as to how he should conduct himself in power which shows the high conception of kingly duty that was current when the poem was written. When the King's eldest son went away to the forest and the King died the elders of the people, the ministers and the preceptor of the royal household gathered together and decided how they should proceed further. The poet at this point makes the people say what great harm arises



from the absence of a ruler in a kingdom. The people pursued all the activities of the kingdom designed to increase wealth and build up the good life under the leadership of the king. As the eye to the body, so was the king to the kingdom. He was embodied truth and rectitude. From him came the honour of lineage. The king was both father and mother to the people, ever doing good to them. When Bharata came to Rama to invite him to return to Ayodhya, Rama put him a number of questions to enquire if things were well in Ayodhya. All these questions may not have been put by Rama at the moment but they indicate no more than is implied in the principles enunciated by Dasaratha earlier. The servants should be allotted work according to their capacity, the army should be given its wages and its food at the appointed time, the receipts of the kingdom should be kept higher, its expenditure lower. Money collected from the people should not be spent upon purposes which could not be justified. Many are the mistakes which a king might make. Among them are indiscriminate interference with existing things, to help untrue men, to indulge in wrath, to walk in thoughtlessness, to forget the immediate step and plan too much on far off schemes, to refuse to see the men who know, to think of the good and leave it unexecuted, to resolve on a course and not follow it up, to divulge plans that should be kept secret. On the whole the way for a king was the way in which his father and forefathers had moved. It is difficult to think of sounder policy for a state than is here indicated. The nations that are prosperous

to day owe their prosperity to the observance of these principles. Many are the kingdoms which neglected them and were ruined. There are kingdoms to day which are going to ruin by neglecting these principles. When Kavana took counsel with Maricha regarding the abduction of Sita that adviser said: "Kings like you slaves to desire of bad character and evil counsel bring themselves and their people and their country to ruin. Why do you make an enemy of Kava? Consider what is right and wrong. Know where strength and weakness lie then decide on your course." When Kavana would not heed to his advice Maricha told him that it is easy for a king to have men about him who will always say things that will please him. Rare is the man who will speak what is good though unpleasant. Rare still the man who will listen to it. Valmiki and the sage thus told Kavana later. A principal rule of council is enumerated in this context. Be it the council in which many advisers examine a question each from his own point of view and concur in one decision. Next is the council in which men differ but agree to accept the view of the majority. That council is evil in which men fall into groups each coming to its own decision and each presenting its own view. The principle thus enumerated is flawed. It is sound to day and would apply to life in the most modern state. The political wisdom of the Ramayana was wisdom perfected by ages of experience. The state policy which Valmiki approved depended on the consent of the people and was calculated to make them happy. A kingdom which follows the policy indicated by

Valmiki may not go far with its power but within the area coming under its sway it would act with discretion and ensure the real happiness of the population

### HOUSEHOLD LIFE

[For the idea of the state to reach this level the life of a population, as a whole, should be fairly advanced. In the life pictured in the Ramayana we do see the prevalence of the advanced ideas that we are led to expect. The household life depicted in the Ramayana is the original of the household life prevalent in India at all times.] Dasaratha who married three queens and wished to act with affection to all the three of them is an object for pity but shows a cultured temperament. He married a second woman and a third and loved the last very greatly, but did not desert the first woman. To the end he showed her some respect. These three queens of his and the three hundred and fifty women who were not queens but belonged to the harem lived such lives as they could in the shelter of the palace. Whatever their feelings towards one another they all treated the King with real regard. All of them loved all his children. All the children treated all the ladies with respect and affection. In a moment of anger the eldest queen reproached the King and the second son said that he would put his father down, but when the eldest son who had not lost his temper told them that what they were saying was not proper, both that queen and that son submitted. Respect for the elder and love for the younger were a prominent

feature of this household life. Respect for the elder however did not come in the way of the younger persons addressing words of caution to the elders when occasion demanded. Rama addressed words of advice to his mother and to his father. Lakshmana and Sita addressed such words to Rama. Respect and affection were given specific form in the life of the household. Dasaratha speaks of Rama as my Rama. Kaikeyi the fond mother caressed her grown up son. She takes Bharata a well grown youth on her lap as if he were a child. When Bharata comes to Rama to invite him back to Ayodhya Rama seats him on his lap to talk to him. When Lakshmana built the hermitage so well or fought the enemy before Lanka with valour the elder brother held the younger to his breast and seated him on his lap. Lakshmana daily prostrated to his sister in law. Rama makes a stone bench in the hermitage for Sita to sit on. When this daughter in law rescued from prison and exile returned to Ayodhya the mothers in law themselves did personal service to her. Kowsalya embraced Sita as she would a daughter. When Rama had to undergo tonsure for anointment as king Satrughna arranged for it. When Rama becomes king one brother holds the whisk near him another brother plays the fan. The main rule of the household life of Rama was for each person to adjust himself to the other each to show affection to the other each to feel more and more affectionate to the other. Hard words occur occasionally in this life as well as harsh thought and unkind conduct but none of these things stayed long. They were like the eclipse which temporarily obscures

the sun. They came for fugitive causes and disappeared as fugitives in the life.

### REFINEMENT OF MANNERS

(The culture that took shape in this way in household life appears in all the life described in the poem. The essential feature of it all was the fineness of manners. All cultured society develops this fineness. Men who do not understand its nature are likely to consider it a type of hypocrisy. The hypocrite shows in outward behaviour a fineness that he has not within. On some occasion he betrays this fact from inability to simulate perfectly. His failure brings a bad name to the quality which he only simulated. This really is not a defect in fine manners. Real fineness of manners is something found both in inward nature and outward conduct. It is not merely fineness of word and fineness of behaviour. It is fineness in these two proceeding from fineness in inner nature. Valmiki's good men and women had the fineness of nature derived from centuries of considerate social aggregation. Rama, the height of manly goodness, illustrates Valmiki's conception of fineness every moment of his life. To all that came near him he had only love. Not to speak of other persons, Ravana as he approached Rama for battle evoked in the latter's breast as a first feeling admiration. The reason was that Rama at all moments of his life thought of the good in all life. This was not altogether peculiar to Rama. Dasaratha, one can see, treated his feudatories, his ministers and the servants of the royal household, always with regard and with

consideration When Dasaratha went to Mithula for the marriage of his sons and asked Janaka's permission to come to the palace Janaka told the elder that such formalities were unnecessary as the palace was his and it was Dasaratha who should permit others there When Rama saw Guha on the way to the forest that king of a forest people told the prince of the Ikshvakus to treat all the wealth of his forest people as his own and asked him to indicate how he could be of service to his friend's son When Bharata stayed for a night with Bharadwaja on the way to the forest to invite Rama back to Ayodhya and started the next morning on the further journey Bharadwaja wished to know who of the three ladies who accompanied the prince was his mother Kaikeyi The way in which he put the question is worthy of a sage in whose curiosity there can be nothing improper Oh son of Raghus he said of your three mothers I desire to know the particulars Bharata indicated who Kowsalya Sumitra and Kaikeyi were and in doing so added words of reproach with reference to Kaikeyi Bharadwaja said Prince it is not right to speak of a mother so When Rama went to Agastya's hermitage and a disciple reported to the sage that two sons of Dasaratha had arrived for an interview Agastya said Bring them in What need was there for asking me? Why did you not bring them in? He was the chief of the sages of Dandaka His anxiety in courtesy is worthy of that position When Rama met Sabari he asked her Mother is your spiritual practice growing? and she replied My spiritual practice has this moment reached

fruition by my seeing you" An old text in Sanskrit asks men to speak truly, to speak pleasantly and not to speak truly but unpleasantly This has been interpreted to mean that one should speak the truth if it is pleasant and not if it is unpleasant It is hardly necessary to distort the advice in this way Speak the truth but speak it pleasantly, speak it not in an unpleasant manner It is possible to say almost anything so as to be not unpleasant All that is required to do this is the desire to make speech sweet, and all that is required in order that man may have this is consideration towards all life, love for the beings with whom one's own life happens to be cast

#### CONSIDERATION, SENTIMENT

Often does Valmiki show that life is made beautiful by consideration and courtesy and love The principal characters in the poem and the incidental characters, all illustrate this point of view At the moment of passing beyond the confines of Kosala, Rama addressed the city of his father's in these words "Great city ruled over by the sons of Kakuthstha, I pray you and the Gods who protect you for permission to leave I shall see you again when I return from exile, having freed my father from debt, and shall rejoin that father and my mothers" He turned to the population that had followed him and said "You have shown me sympathy and kindness to the extent that is necessary Disproportionate sorrow is wrong Return now to your daily tasks" Some-time later Rama said to Lakshmana "I wonder when I shall return from this exile and bathe in the waters





body She took it in her hand and felt as happy as if she had seen Rama again When Hanuman gave to Rama's hand the jewel of her crest which Sita had given into his hand, Rama also was moved to his depths "Our father Janaka gave this jewel to his daughter at the time of our marriage She wore it in her hair and looked beautiful" The sight of the jewel brought to Rama's memory the hour of his marriage, and he felt as if he had seen his father and his father-in-law One day in the forests a bird called out from a nearby tree and Rama told Sita that the sound it made was like his mother calling him "Putia, putia" When Sita told her story to Anasuya, the old lady took her in her hand, caressed her and said "How well you speak, my daughter! You speak clearly, you speak prettily and so sweetly" and said "It is evening, my child, go to Rama" Before going she wanted the young woman to do only this "Do your toilet in my presence so that I can watch you Wear your best clothes my child, and give me the joy of seeing you" The old wife of the ascetic felt her own joy rekindled in the joy that kindled the face of the young princess as she made boast of her handsome and loving husband She desired the young woman to go through the details of her toilet in her presence It gave her delight to see the young life adding to its grace Healthy old age feels indescribable joy in seeing hopeful youth The old ladies who watch and bless a young wife delight in her beauty far more than the husband who uses her person The poet of the Ramayana knew that of the things that make life beautiful affection is the

greatest. Even when life is a wilderness a little love is like the jasmine in it. The flower gives beauty to the wilderness and makes the air fragrant. The dream of beauty struggling in the heart of the wilderness takes shape in the flower and the aspirations of that heart are completed by it.

### THE LIFE OF THE PEOPLE

We do not get in the Ramayana details of the life of the population of the country. The poem gave the story of a royal household and the adventures of a prince. It was therefore not necessary for the poet to describe the life of the people at any length. Yet incidentally we get some details which show what that life was like. It appears at the very beginning of the story that when the king wished to make his son the king *de facto* he sent for the leaders of the people and asked for their consent. They agreed heartily, praising the young man greatly. The king half in jest asked them if they were tired of him that they fell in so readily with the proposal for a change. They explained how it was that they were so anxious to have the young prince as ruler. The young man had acted with such consideration towards the people that his mind and their mind had as it were become one. Their joy he felt as his own and their pain as his pain. The picture we get of the relations between the king and his subjects in this incident is almost that of the relations between the head of a village and of its inhabitants. So close and so intimate it seems. When later the king had to give up the idea of his eldest son being *de facto* ruler he

did not send for the people again and ask for their concurrence nor does it appear that the population, however much it regretted the development thought of preventing it. When Rama started for the forest a large concourse of people followed him a long way. Many received the presents which he gave before leaving the city. One Brahmin at his wife's instance came to the prince and begged. Rama jested with him a little and gave him all that his heart could wish. The prince told the people who followed him so far on the way that they need not go with him any further and asked them to return. They did not agree. The next morning he rose while they were still asleep, got into the chariot and had it driven in a particular direction so as to mislead them, and then turned and drove away in the other. Without this trick it would not have been possible for him to get free of them. The people woke up and saw that their prince had gone and cried out in sorrow. It appears as if Valmiki lived in a wood almost on the borders of Kosala. There should have been many villages near his hermitage. He had seen the life of the people in those villages and reached his perfect knowledge of their ways. The substance in regard to the life of the people then as now seems to have been this. Who ruled and how he ruled was not of great importance to them. No one ruled very badly and the people had for him who ruled some consideration, some regard. They had sympathy with him in his pleasure and his pain and acted towards him with a nobility of heart which was simple and unsophisticated. Their attitude to their king was their attitude to all life.

The population was not wise with much wisdom but it was in the main kindly and good. It was also of the type that deserved kindness from the men who knew.

#### LANKA AND KISHKINDHA

The *Ramayana* describes two civilizations and cultures besides the civilization and culture of Ayodhya. These are the culture and civilization of Kishkindha and of Lanka. There is no indication in the poem that the civilization of Lanka or Kishkindha was less worthy of praise than that of Ayodhya. Rama saw Lanka and expressed great admiration of it to Lakshmana. The city was set on a hill. It seemed to Rama like writing in the sky or as made by the creator out of mind stuff. It was a beautiful city with palaces and mansions and gardens and groves. Its wealth was not less than the wealth of Ayodhya. The poet calls Kishkindha a cave but this seems to have been more a way of calling the place than describing it. For in this town also there were the homes of a king and of the other inhabitants of the town. It looks as if Kishkindha was a town girt round with hills with only one entrance through them at some point. It might have been a town like for example Sandur. The wealth of Kishkindha if not of the same sort as that of Ayodhya and Lanka was still great. It had all the sumptuous appointments of kingly state for Vali and Sugriva. Alike in Lanka and Kishkindha there was an organization for ruling and for administration. The difference between the *Nara*, the *Vanara* and the *Rakshasa* civilizations lay

not in their material possession nor the appurtenances of comfort. It lay in their way of life and their outlook. There was even sonorous repetition of the Veda in Lanka, as in Ayodhya. When Ravana walked into Rama's hermitage in Janasthana to steal Sita he walked in as an ascetic making the Vedic cry in orthodox fashion. As between themselves the *Rakshasas* conducted themselves well. How well will appear from the fact that when Vibhishana disagreed with his brother and went away to Rama, neither Ravana nor his son gave any trouble to the family which he left behind. This is not a small matter in such a situation. Considerateness was, however, no part of the attitude of the *Rakshasas* to those who did not belong to them. If they found it necessary these people would practise deceit in warfare and employ trickery to compass their ends. A distinct feature which made the civilization of Lanka somewhat lower than that of Ayodhya was the treatment of woman, to a large extent, as an article yielding pleasure. If a woman was handsome, the best among them could think of stealing her. This of course relates to the population as a whole. Single persons like Vibhishana had higher ideals and were in no way inferior to the best that could be said of the northern civilization. The culture of the *Vanara* was somewhat lower than that of the *Rakshasa*. While the *Rakshasa* would bring others' women from desire of pleasure, the *Vanara* used the women of the clan that became available. The *Vanara* was not wantonly cruel to strangers as the *Rakshasa* seems to have been but when tempers ran high in a quarrel, and there was

nothing that the biggest of them would not do to his own brother when he was roused. Though Valmiki describes all the three cultures with sympathy there is no doubt that he thought that the ideals to which the culture of Avodhya was inclined were the highest. Its distinct character lay in its insistence on righteousness as against the pursuit of mere pleasure. Its outlook was best exemplified in its great hero Rama who was willing to have pleasure if it came along with righteousness but preferred to go without it if the path to it lay through unrighteousness. The other two civilizations did not attach the same importance to righteousness in life. One of them would take pleasure by whatever way it came. The other would get it even by injuring others.

#### NORTH AND SOUTH

There is also in the Ramayan an indication of the conflict of the two cultures which may be called Aryan and Dravidian. As we have the poem at present the *Rakshasas* were opposed to the performance of sacrifices. The poet's view no doubt was that this was wrong on the part of the *Rakshasa*. He belonged to a civilization which believed in sacrifices. To a man of the other civilization the matter might well have appeared differently. Valmiki himself though he did not agree with the *Rakshasa* described him with sympathy. For his Maricha practised austerity and asceticism like any sage from the north and his hermitage was no bit inferior to the hermitage of any Aryan. But the *Rakshasa* did not believe in sacrifice or he believed in it only for special purposes as when

Ravana's son performed a sacrifice to get special powers for fighting. Normally he thought of a sacrifice as a thing to be obstructed. What is called the path of devotion in Indian religions is believed to have taken its rise in the South. There are several sects professing this path and they have always objected to the taking of life in the name of religion. The Viṣaṁvas and Vaiṣṇavas of the present day are inheritors of this tradition. When Aryan and Dravidian cultures mingled, the Aryan of the North accepted the paths of devotion and the Dravidian of the South adopted sacrifices. But in the early age described in the Ramayana this rapprochement had apparently not developed. There is an indication of the same conflict between the path of ritual and the path of devotion in the Bhagavata. It would appear as if this conflict began before the days of the Ramayana and decreased by the time of Krishna. It has not yet ended. Looked at in this way, the incidents in the Ramayana give rise to the question whether the *Rakshasas* who obstructed the sacrifices of the sages from the North might not have been followers of the schools of devotion prevalent even so early in the South. A circumstance that encourages the impression that this might have been the case is the fact of Prahlada, an *Asura*, being considered as one of the founders of the path of devotion. It seems unnecessary to discuss this subject at greater length here, but it is important to remember that in this matter there may have been a view of the South as there was a view of the North.

## VII SOME QUESTIONS

WE may now state certain questions that have been raised in regard to the Ramayana and indicate the possible answers. Among these questions are the following. Was the Ramayana story invented or was it based on fact? Was there a king of the name of Rama and wife of his of the name of Sita and did a person of the name of Ravana steal Rama's wife? If the story did take place when was it and where? If the story of Rama, Sita and Ravana is true is it also true that the sons of Sagara dug the sea and that Viswamitra, Dasaratha and Rama ruled for thousands and thousands of years and Jatayu and Sampathu were birds and spole and Sugriva and Hanuman were monkeys and aided Rama? And did Hanuman jump across twelve hundred miles of sea? Was there an aerial conveyance called *Pushpala Vimana* and did the Gods come down to earth and speak to men as stated in the poem? Where was Lanka? What language did the people of Kosala, Kishkindha and Lanka speak to one another? It would be unnecessary to multiply these questions.

### ORTHODOX HINDU OUTLOOK

Before considering the possible answers it is necessary to see how the Ramayana is viewed traditionally by the people who believe in it as a religious text. Those who proceed with the assumption that Rama was an incarnation of Vishnu interpret the





had in his mind but it led the critics wrong at times. They saw distinctions where none existed and imagined meanings of which the poet could not have been guilty. For example when the poet tells us that Sita's mothers in law attended to her toilet personally on the day of her coronation with her husband the interpreters say that the mothers in law did this lest the world should blame them for being inattentive. The mother in law in Hindu households is to day the acme of inconsiderate seniority but it is not necessary to import this into the Ramayana and interpret an innocent passage as if it were a comment on present day life. Like men who may carry some gruel from their household when invited to a king's feast we take our own small meanings into Valmiki's great poem and in the midst of his beauteous plenty delight in the ugliness that we carry there. The way in which the followers of tradition twist the words that imply the superiority of Siva and Vishnu is like a zigzag lightning starting anywhere and ending where one would least expect it. The bow that Rama broke in the palace of Janaka was Siva's bow. The bow that he received from Parasurama was Vishnu's bow. When Rama bent Siva's bow it broke. Vishnu's bow did not break. Siva's bow had been damaged in the fight between Vishnu and Siva in the past. The advocates of Vishnu's supremacy argue from this that Vishnu was the stronger. The advocates of Siva's supremacy have made Rama worship Siva as God in order to be successful in his enterprises. To people of all the types here mentioned one thing is common. They believe every word of the Ramayana.

as they have it to-day, and they believe also that each word is true in the sense in which they interpret it. Dasaratha and Rama lived for thousands of years each. The children of Sagara dug up the ground and made the ocean. Hanuman did jump across twelve hundred miles of sea. Ravana's aerial car was a fact. Jatayu was a bird and he could speak. Thus these minds are in one sense simple to the extreme of simplicity, in another sense subtle to the extreme of subtlety. There is nothing that they cannot believe. There is nothing of another opinion with which they can agree.

Others also in the tradition, interpret the Ramayana as if it were nothing more than a spiritual parable. To these people the whole poem is one huge similitude. Every character in it stands for some principle or idea or entity of the world of spirit. The story is merely the story of the progress of a soul. Dasaratha in this way of interpretation is the wealth of the earth. Rama is the universal soul which comes to live in this wealth. Sita is the individual soul. Ravana is the body of the ten senses which makes the individual soul a prisoner. Rama the universal soul vanquishes the body with its ten sense organs and saves the individual soul for himself. Or Ayodhya is the seat of the mind. Lanka is a point in the lower half of the body. Rama and Sita's going from Ayodhya to the forest and from there to Lanka and returning from Lanka to Ayodhya are merely symbolic of the individual soul moving in the practice of *Yoga* from the seat of the spirit to the lower purposes of life and to purposes still lower and

returning from there again to the seat of the spirit and being established finally in emancipation. It is necessary to understand one simple fact about literature before dealing with suggestions of this sort about a work of art. There have been poems which started with the object of stating ideas. In the Vedantic schools of discussion plays arose which showed wisdom and desire and anger and other emotions in conflict and propounded the need for accepting wisdom. The miracle plays and moralities of medieval England were work of the same kind. Even in such cases it is never possible for the poet to keep strictly to the symbol. A story has after all a strength of its own and the narrator who thinks he is sitting on it and controlling it for his own purposes finds at times that it runs in its own way and leads him a little out of his strict purposes. A story begun for inculcating ideas by the use of similitude however generally retains the stamp of a parable and can be recognised as such. The Ramayana is not a narrative of this kind. What we see in the Ramayana is not essentially a symbolic story nor is it a story which began as a parable but led the author a little outside the parable in consequence of its innate power. The Ramayana is essentially a narrative of human life. It is possible to consider some of the characters as principles and interpret certain of the incidents as steps in the progress of the human soul but it would be impossible to give all the characters and all the incidents in the story a meaning from the world of spirit. The affection of Rama and Sita to each other may be interpreted as the attraction between the

individual and the universal soul. All affection known in the world can be so interpreted, but Sita's insistence on going to the forest with Rama, the words that they exchange with each other in that context, the play of love between them in the other situations in the story, the humour and the laughter and the tears of the whole narrative, cannot be provided with symbolic analogues in the world of spirit. It would in the first place be very difficult and in any case grotesque. A person who wished to propound ideas would never develop his story to the almost endless detail to which the Ramayana is taken. The daily life of the characters would not have found such spacious description. Sumitra, Sumantra, Guha and Bharadwaja would not have been so meticulously human. The Ramayana is really a story. We may derive from it ideas relating to the world of spirit, but the characters of the poem are not lay figures intended merely to stand for ideas. The story is not a thin stream which can be held, as in a pond, in the four corners of a well-constructed parable. It is a vast spread of the waters of life whose expanse resembles the expanse of the ocean.

It is usual to treat both these ways of interpretation as ways of orthodox belief. A man who believes that Rama stands for the universal soul is still accepted by orthodoxy as he worships the hero as God. It is hard to see how Rama and Sita could really have lived as human beings and passed through their sorrows and sufferings and yet be merely symbols of spiritual ideas. It looks as if the hypothesis of a parable should exclude the possibility of Rama-

having been really present and walked on the surface of the earth. To those who believe that Rama did move about on the surface of the earth as a man the suggestion of his being just an idea should appear a kind of demal of Rama. But the two groups can stay together because both postulate at the outset that Rama was God.

### WESTERN CRITICISM

Over against these schools of orthodoxy stand scholars of the West who appreciating the Ramayana in various degrees as poetry give its features meanings which show their own inclinations. The Ramayana is at present a religious poem for Hindus and in the poem here and there are words extolling the Brahmin and Brahminhood. (A Western scholar sees in the poem a narrative developed by the Brahmin to establish his supreme position in Hindu society.) A critic who studies the poem with this idea in his mind finds support for it in the most unexpected quarters. The fight between Vasishtha and Viswamitra is to such a critic an essential part of the Ramayana and the fight itself not a fight between an individual Brahmin and an individual Kshatriya but between Brahmindom and the Kshatriya class. In the story of Parasurama slaying the Kshatriyas of his time the critic sees a narrative statement that the Brahmin as a class put down the Kshatriya as a class. If the men who wrote or adapted the poem believed that the Brahmin was superior to the Kshatriya why did they make the Brahmin preceptor worship the Kshatriya king as an incarnation of God? Why did they not suppress the

story of the Brahmin Parasurama having had to surrender to the Kshatriya Rama? The critic does not answer these difficulties satisfactorily. Not only is the critic thus creating a split between two groups in Hinduism that he finds to-day, he suggests also that the poem started with the object of quelling Buddhism, almost as if he wished to revive such dislike as there might have been in the past between the followers of the two faiths. When he starts with this object, Jabali in the poem is to the critic a follower of Buddha. His remonstrance with Rama not to attach too much importance to his father's promise is to him Brahminical restatement of Buddhist agnosticism, and Rama's rebuke of Jabali is the rebuke that Hinduism in the days of its revival administered to Buddhism in its ebb. There is a verse in the Ramayana referring to the Buddha in contemptuous terms. The poem, such a critic says, was written after the days of Buddha for counteracting the effects of Buddhism. To other critics still, Rama is as imaginary as the story of his having ruled over eleven thousand years or of a monkey having jumped across the ocean. The whole poem in their opinion is a work of imagination. Its great palaces and cities are exaggerations or figments of poetic invention. If there ever were such towns and cities, they say, why do not they find any sign of them to-day? Some of these critics have suggested that the Ramayana at first went only as far as Rama's exile, that thereafter it grew to the point in which Rama went to Dandaka and extended protection to the sages there, that thereafter, on the conquest of Ceylon by the Indians it developed a narrative of the fight

with the outposts of Ravana and the abduction of Sita and her rescue. The poem as we have it now states that Rama was born in a certain position of the constellations. The description of the constellation is in a manner which it would seem the Hindus adopted from the Greeks. Some critics suggest therefore that the Ramayana was composed after the Greeks came into India. Sita we are told is a name that occurs in the Veda. Sita loved the moon. The moon loved Sita's sister Sraddha. In the end he came to love Sita herself. Therefore a critic says this story of Sita which we call Ramayana is a narrative symbolising the lives of the moon and the mist and such other facts of nature. There is a narrative relating to Rama in the Mahabharata which does not include any portion corresponding to the *Bala Kanda* of the Ramayana and omits various other details that we have in the poem of Valmiki. The Mahabharata narrative does not refer to the existence of the Ramayana and does not mention Valmiki as the author. This leads a critic to assume that the narrative in the Mahabharata should have been composed earlier than the expanded poem now attributed to Valmiki. There is among the Jatakas stories one which goes by the name of Dasaratha. Many of the details are different yet there is some similarity between the narrative of the Jataka and the story of Valmiki's poem: two brothers and a sister being banished and the sister marrying the brother in the end. A critic holds the view that the Dasaratha Jataka should be the earlier poem and that the story of the Ramayana should have been developed from that original.



## THE MIDDLE WAY

To a person not inclined to unquestioning belief and infinite subtlety in the manner of the orthodox schools, nor on the other hand to question everything about the poem in a spirit of almost merciless detachment in the manner of the critic that comes from the West, the position expounded by either class seems extreme. The believer stretches his belief too far, the doubter doubts nearly everything. The way of safety seems to lie somewhere between. What the truth is it would be difficult to say with any certainty, but what it might be can be indicated with some amount of confidence. To do this we have to read the Ramayana as we should read any similar poem from another people and civilization, and believe that it should have arisen as such a poem might normally arise in another country and amidst another people. What is obviously impossible is likewise to be rejected, or understood in a sensible manner. The inhabitants of Kishkindha were not monkeys. Hanuman did not jump across twelve hundred miles of ocean. Ravana's aerial car is in all likelihood a thing of imagination. The accounts of men and Gods holding speech with each other is similarly a thing of imagination. The inhabitants of Kishkindha were perhaps called monkeys as they seemed like monkeys to the people of the North. When Sugriva and his followers accompanied Rama in the coronation procession we are told that they sat on elephants in the manner of men. It would appear as if they wore clothes in the manner in which the people of Ayodhya wore them and not as they wore them in Kishkindha. In Kishkindha they

had tails. This probably means that the people of Kishkindha wore their clothes with an extra length hanging behind like a tail from their waist. There are people who wear the loin cloth in this way even now and in pictures of the inhabitants of Bali and Java one sees a costume which includes a tail-like appendage at the back. Hanuman might have had to go across a large sheet of water and may have accomplished this by swimming. This suggestion finds support from the incident of Hanuman having passed into the mouth of Surasa and come out. Surasa here could mean water. The statement that when Surasa became ninety *yojanas* Hanuman became a hundred so that she could not swallow him and that suddenly in the end he became small and passed in and out could both be poetic ways of saying that the water was wide but Hanuman was more than equal to its width and got into it and out of it unswallowed. Lanka in this context is not necessarily Ceylon. A careful student of the Ramayana of great intellectual ability has after much patient and painstaking investigation come to the conclusion that the Lanka of the Ramayana was somewhere in Central India. We have also to remember that the story as originally composed has been altered in many details. As one verse in the introduction says the Ramayana is a hundred crore verses long. Wherever Indian culture went the story of Rama went also and in proportion to the currency it gained it underwent alteration in details. In the *Jataka* story Rama and Sita are brother and sister who married at the end. In a narrative current in

the Bali islands, Rama goes to the forest not on account of a brother but an uncle Vali, in that narrative, is an uncle of Sugriva. But another form of the narrative, also current in the island, is nearer to the form in Valmiki. In the sculpture in the temples of Siam there are panels picturing the story of Rama. It would appear that the story of Brahma giving Valmiki the order to write the Ramayana is found among these panels. Apart from the version of the Ramayana in the orthodox faith, there are in India versions in the other groups such as the Jains. In such cases the narrator modified the story from the point of view of his faith. To get the substance of the poem as it might have been when it first gained currency we have to go behind all such alteration and reconstruct the narrative as naturally as possible.

#### THE KERNEL OF THE STORY

Such a reconstruction yields us the following story. Very long ago a king of the name of Dasaratha ruled in the land of Kosala. He had three queens and four sons by them. It became necessary for Rama to go to exile. The king of another people stole Rama's wife and Rama rescued her. A people whom the Aiyans of the north called *Vanara*, a kind of men, were of assistance to Rama in this enterprise. On return from exile Rama became king. Valmiki, a poet of his day or a later time, composed a narrative of the adventures of Rama. Rama's noble qualities endeared him to the people and they held him to be an incarnation of God. This should have occurred somewhere about the time when the verse

form known as *Sloka* first took a definite shape in the language now known as Sanskrit possibly when the early Upanishads were being composed

### THE TIME OF THE STORY

And when might this have been? The Ramayana has been called the first poem in Sanskrit Kalidasa is known as a recent figure in Sanskrit literature He referred to Valmiki as a leader of early time No figure that was recent in his day could have been referred to in these terms by the poet The story of the seventh book it has been stated was added to the story of the Ramayana long after it gained currency as a poem This story was accepted as part of the Ramayana by the time of Kalidasa and Bhavabhuti No recent addition could have been so mingled with the original as this part of the narrative had by the days of the two great dramatists Centuries would not be too long an interval for this to have happened How then could the story of the Ramayana be derived from a story in the *Jatakas*? How again could the Ramayana have been called the first poem in a language in which the Mahabharata with its narrative relating to Rama had already gained currency? It seems impossible to accept the suggestion that the *Jataka* story and the Rama narrative in the Mahabharata were earlier than the original in Valmiki's Ramayana The suggestion again that the poem was written in order to put down Buddhism seems unsound There is one verse in the Ramayana which definitely refers to Buddha That verse however occurs in a passage which is clearly an

interpolation. If we omit it from consideration there is nothing in the story except Jabali's rationalistic argument and its refutation by Rama to suggest that the poem was got up with the object of counteracting the teachings of Buddhism. But rationalism could not have begun with Buddha or his followers. It is part of human nature. It comes up in all human investigation and speculation and there is rationalism in poetry in other lands which could not have come from Buddha. It could occur in poetry in India prior to his day. The argument based upon the constellation in which Rama is stated to have been born is also inconclusive. In the first place it would be hazardous to say that the Hindus learnt a certain way of casting the horoscope from the Greeks and not the Greeks from the Hindus. A civilization as ancient as that of India may have had intellectual commerce with the Greeks but this particular way of casting the horoscope might have gone from India to Greece quite as well as it could have come from Greece to India. That apart, it would appear that the particular combination of the stars described in the verse now found in the Ramayana is impossible and could never have occurred. In the third place it would appear that this verse indicating the particular hour in which Rama was born in terms of a horoscope is not found in all the recensions of the poem. The passage should have been interpolation. If it was not a part of the poem as originally composed it is unnecessary to conclude that the poem was written after the Greeks came into India. It would thus be wrong to assign the poem as Western criticism does to a

few hundred years before the beginning of the Christian era. For progress from step to step in an ancient civilization the intervals with which we are familiar for similar steps in modern times would be inadequate. Things should have moved slower in those early times and for all that we can see the story of Rama as first recorded did not know Buddha nor the Greeks. It occurred long prior to the sophisticated age in which Siva and Vishnu were given definite places in the Hindu pantheon and were conceived as coming to earth for the protection of their devotees.

#### A CHAPTER OF SPECULATION

It has been suggested above that the incidents normally impossible can be given some reasonable meaning in a process of natural interpretation. We may be quite certain that incidents of this kind were added to the poem either at the time of the earliest composition in obedience to a poetic convention or later as the result of exuberant imagination on the part of popular bards reciting to audiences when both bard and audience knew the narrative merely as a narrative and recked little what impossible addition was made to it. When a narrative is added to in this way the memories and traditions of a nation and fantastic tales brought in by travellers and figments of the imagination of a bard himself come in a welter into the cauldron and are there fused into such mess as may be possible. Valmiki might have described the inhabitants of Kishkindha as a kind of men. *Vanara* the word he used should later

have come to mean monkey. Later poetry treated the men he referred to definitely as monkeys and probably attributed to them the size and strength, the prowess and endurance, exaggerated many-fold from what men had heard, of the huge wild animals of tropic forests. The monkey hordes may have been a people who carried the flag with the monkey as a symbol. Investigators into the early history of the earth declare that in ancient time, Asia, Africa and America were connected by land. What common life of the time when human and half-human creatures passed from one of these continents to another lingered in the memory of the population and got mixed in the heroic legend of a later time it would be hard to tell. Indians to-day name their septs with the names of birds. The Red Indians did this. Jatayu may have been some king of the forests who claimed descent from a bird much as a Red Indian might. A civilization of South America which is now in ruins is called the Maya civilization. It is interesting to note that Maya is the name of an architect of the *Asuras* of whom the Mahabharata tells a story. The architecture and sculpture of the ruined temples of this civilization of the South American wilds bear some resemblance to the architecture and sculpture of temples in South India. One place in the Maya area has the name of Mitla, another Lanka and another Rama. What may these Maya similarities mean? There is an old belief that the strip of land in the west coast of India between the *ghats* and the sea came out of the water at Parasurama's bidding. It is also believed that

Mamallapuram on the east coast was a great city in the past and that one fatal day it went under the water. What movement of the earth trying to wear its vesture of waters a little differently this tradition may indicate who can tell? It may be that a very slight roll which the earth then took put one or more cities on one side into the sea brought a wide strip of land on another side out of it and placed under the waves a continent and diverse islands. The story of the Minaka coming up from the waters to give hospitality to Hanuman and the description of the great wealth of Lanka may be wisps of the memory of bygone times to which the population clung tenaciously through the centuries to hand it over at last to a poet who could embody them in a story he was narrating. Even about the aerial car a suggestion may be made. It is not likely that there were aeroplanes in that age but not quite impossible that they had some conveyance which sped as in the air and could be described as doing so. The magnificent structures of ancient time which have survived the ravages of the centuries have made men ask what were the appliances which so multiplied the strength of man's hands that he could lift such huge units to such giddy heights. Men may have known a way of travelling or seeming to travel through the air as they knew the way of raising these stupendous edifices. Where has the secret gone? And why did aeroplanes have to be invented? It is nothing new in civilization that a secret of doing great things is discovered and lost and discovered again. There are to day secrets about the working of the great features



of civilization which are known only to small numbers of people. The loss of these secrets so irretrievably that they would again have to be discovered by our descendants is not inconceivable. Secret remedies in India for various diseases are kept so closely guarded that only a few persons in all this continent know each of them and if these persons go, the knowledge of the remedies will go with them. Inventions may have been in use once and then so forgotten that they would have to be found again as no doubt they will, when the circumstances demand them. What man has done once man can do again. What man can do now, man in similar circumstances could have done in the past. All this, however, is not to be taken as asserting that any of these possibilities was fact. The argument is intended merely to suggest these possibilities, however remote, and to urge that later times add to an early narrative wonderful portions deriving from many sources, and that in reading the Ramayana as in reading any other poem of similar character current among another people, we have to allow a margin for these additions.

#### THE TRUTH OF THE POEM

The Ramayana as accepted by orthodox belief is twenty-four thousand verses long. If we take only the portion of the narrative that is natural and possible we give up a good part of this length. Those who have learnt to love the poem as it is will feel that this is a pity, but if they look at the poem that remains they will find that it is much better than the poem they love at present. That, more or less, would

also be how the story of the Rāmāyana actually took place. The punctilious critic who goes to the other extreme may say that the places and persons referred to in the poem are not identifiable in history and geography to day and that there never was a person corresponding to the hero of the Rāmāyana in fact and that the story is not a narrative of things that really occurred. Conceding this for argument there is from the point of view of the poem or of the people no great loss. Whether in the world outside there was or was not an individual corresponding to Valmiki's Rama such a person did exist in the imagination of the nation's poet. In the same imagination there was a lady of the name of Sita wife of the hero. That man in the poet's imagination was the ideal of the nation's righteousness and truthfulness. That lady was the crown of the nation's dream of pure womanhood and wifely duty. What matters it if in the outer world a certain body did not move as that of Rama and a certain other as that of Sita? Even if they did move at one time they have now disappeared. But the shapes which these persons assume in the poet's imagination remain uneffaced. We do not doubt the truth of these figures. A man in sleep has no knowledge of the things going on about him in the house. The life of his dream is real to him. There may be a serpent under his cot he is not afraid of it. He sees a serpent in his dream and cries out in terror. That which touches our mind and stirs feeling is true truth. That which might have existed sometime in the past but does not touch our mind to day is truth of the past not truth of the

present Its truth is incomplete This is why poetic truth is greater and more important than truth of fact Those who understand this will not feel unhappy when strange investigations throw doubt on the historicity of Rama and Sita, nor fear the statement that the great couple did not exist Whether they existed once or not is not important They exist now and, if we care, they will exist for ever

### XIII THE VALUATION OF VALMIKI

#### SOME COMPARISONS

AMONG the discussions made usual by Western criticism there is one comparing the poems of India with poems of other lands and determining their worth The poems so compared with the Ramayana are Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, Virgil's *Aeneid*, Dante's *Divine Comedy* and Milton's *Paradise Lost* The oldest of these are the poems attributed to Homer Virgil wrote as a follower of Homer Dante embodied in his poem numerous narratives depicting life here and hereafter from the point of view of religion Milton wrote as a successor to these great poets Those who know the Western poets in the original do not often know the Sanskrit poem to the same extent Those who know the Sanskrit poem well are, except perhaps for Milton's *Paradise Lost*, often unacquainted with the poems of the West in the original A comparison in these circumstances is based largely on knowledge of the original on one side and of

translations on the other. Such comparison is necessarily unsafe. With caution it would yield a general opinion of the manner and ability of the usual work of the poets as seen either in the original or in the translation. One thing should be said about all the poems of the West. The longest of them has a sense of proportion. The Ramayana also has this sense where it likes; at other points it knows no such thing. One reason for its apparent want of this sense is the inclusion in it in later times of narratives not originally there. Besides it appears as if when it comes to a description of fighting Valmiki never thinks whether he has not said enough. The Ramayana is in consequence somewhat unwieldy as compared with the poems of the West. In other respects the Ramayana need not fear comparison with the poems of Homer or his successors. One Western critic says that the Ramayana and the Mahabharata are no less wonderful than the Homeric poems as monuments of the human mind. The Oriental poems cannot compare with the Western poems in simplicity and proportion but their diction is more polished with the weaknesses that come of polish. The Indian epics have indications of a higher degree of civilization and they rise above the Homeric poems in the religious sense underlying all the narrative. This sense indeed dominates the narratives and casts on them the shadow of an all pervading sacerdotalism. In descriptions of scenery and natural objects he observes Homer is too short and general to be picturesque. His descriptions want more colouring and minuteness of detail. The Hindu poets are certainly more graphic and picturesque

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than either Greek or Latin" Other critics do not find in Valmiki all the good things enumerated by this critic They find one or two defects which did not strike him Virgil and Dante followed Homer as disciples of their master and what is said of Homer as compared with Valmiki applies to them Milton wrote long after these three poets and exercised a discipline which came by a study of their work It is very likely that Western students will find the poems of Homer and Dante, Virgil and Milton, more pleasing than the Ramayana Indians also, when they have received Western education, may find their tastes so formed that the more well-knit poems of Homer and his successors seem superior to the exuberant work of Valmiki To the majority of those who study English in our Universities, Milton may seem a better poet than all his predecessors Indeed they read more of him than they do of Valmiki Yet one fact has to be borne in mind Economy of narration and skill of construction are important qualities in a poem, but they cannot outweigh other qualities which give it worth Portrayal of life, delineation of character, description of nature and skill of narration are some of these qualities If a poem is great in these respects and is also well-knit it gains in worth If it is great in those respects but is defective in construction and somewhat lacking in a sense of proportion, it may lose something of its worth but not much All students of the Ramayana agree that the poem has all the essential qualities of a great poem Valmiki composed it at a time when economy could not have been thought a great quality

in narration. He and his men as Homer and his men in his day recited poem before audiences. A poem in those circumstances does not measure length in the way of later poetry. Virgil and Dante and more than either of them Milton wrote their poems and read them. Valmiki and Homer composed theirs and sang them. If an audience was willing to listen Homer and Valmiki had no need to shorten their narrative. To later poets palm leaf or paper helped how long their narrative had become. In the poet reciting to an audience the limit was the patience of that audience. People in India even to-day how restless they are when hearing a story. Their forbears in the days of Valmiki would seem to have had even greater patience. This led the poet to lengthen his poem beyond our measures. Men later learned to feel tired of this length and when any talk became long winded they referred to it as *Karmavani*. On the whole however they accepted the poem as it came to them and devised a way of studying it which cured it of its tiresomeness. They read only a few chapters at a sitting and audiences listened to the story day after day until it concluded staying away from the portions which did not interest them and sleeping through others which wearied them. If we judge the *Ramayana* as a poem composed when writing was not common and sung to audiences we realise that its great length is not a great defect and can value its good qualities without a heavy discount. It will then appear that in picturing life the only poetry that can stand with the *Ramayana* is the poetry of Homer and that Virgil may stand near. In description of nature



it is doubtful if any other poet equals Valmiki. To Indians themselves Valmiki's pictures of life seem no way behind the pictures in Homer or his successors. What is more, in so far as they deal with more familiar matter, they make a better appeal. In comparing the great poets with one another, however, we do well to bear in mind a warning given by Goethe. When men see two great poets let them not waste time asking which of them is greater, let them rather be grateful that they have two such poets. Of Homer and Valmiki or Virgil and Valmiki, we do well to think in this way. If Homer and Valmiki came together they would not ask for a decision as to which of them was greater. If by any chance the question did cross the mind of either, he would keep it there and show great respect to the other. We who respect these great poets ought not to race them to see which of them wins. Homer is worthy of respect, so is Valmiki. Criticism grows to wisdom when it realises this and does not exercise itself stating their respective worths correct to ounce and scruple.

#### ORIGIN FULLY INDIAN

A suggestion is sometimes made in this connection that the poet of the Ramayana knew Homer's *Iliad* and composed it under that influence. The Greeks came into India with Alexander and according to this view, the intercourse between the two countries then set up led an Indian poet to write a poem for his people after the manner of the *Iliad*. A part of the argument relating to this subject has been dealt with already. The verses describing the position of the

constellations or the planetary combination at the hour of Rama's birth are not a part of the Ramayana as originally composed. To ascribe to the original Ramayana a date when these verses could have been written is unnecessary. No other ground is suggested for concluding that the Indian poet composed his narrative under the influence of the Greek poet except the similarity between the stories. It is difficult for any far minded reader of the Ramayana to see such similarity between that poem and Homer's poem as would justify the suggestion of influence. A poem written in the manner of another shows unmistakable signs of its affiliation. Virgil's and Dante's and Milton's poems contain clear indications of their authors following a predecessor. The poetry of Kalidasa has unmistakable traces of the guidance he received from his great master Valmiki. No such similarity is traceable when we compare the Ramayana with the *Iliad*. There is theft of a woman in both and there is a fight in consequence. To argue from this that one of the poems owes its existence to the other is not wise. One draws largely from imagination to build so much on so little evidence. The reason for making the suggestion at all is that someone holds the Greeks in high esteem and cannot imagine the Indian developing his own literature independently. The Greeks are known to have had a great civilization. Alexander was one of them. The Indians may have had a great civilization. The names of their kings are not known to the critic. He therefore makes up his mind that the Indian should owe the story to the Greek. But the fact is that India had a civilization as

great as the Greeks and had it much earlier. The particular conditions in which a great epic poem would come into existence may not live in man's memory in the one case as in the other, but that the populations that dwelt in India lived a spacious life of adventure cannot be doubted. Philosophy and religion which cannot be discounted as imitation and hundreds of facts about the past of India brought to light by the labours of others of these same scholars prove this sufficiently. The Ramayana could well arise independently in India as the *Iliad* arose in Greece. Narrative poetry celebrating the adventures of national heroes was common enough in all ancient populations. If there was a noble-hearted and generous king in India as there were noble-hearted and generous heroes in Greece, and a life of heroism here as there, a patriotic bard might sing his praise here as Homer did the praise of the heroes of his land in Greece. A great poem could thus come into being in India without any copying being necessary. It should also be stated that this theory of Valmiki having based his poem on a knowledge of Homer's *Iliad* is not accepted by many scholars even in the West. The Ramayana has its own way in narration and description and its outlook on life is entirely its own. The morality of the Ramayana is not the morality of the *Iliad* and its men and women are different from the men and women of the *Iliad*. Valmiki would not have hesitated to learn from other poets as he learnt from life but he was too fully in touch with the original source of all great poetry to owe his inspiration to a fellow workman.

## XIV VALMIKI THE TEACHER

### THE POET'S VISION

VALMIKI in fact was so independent in his inspiration that he was a great source of inspiration to later times. He was a teacher in the highest sense of the term. To an instinct for understanding and describing life he added a wide sympathy for and keen insight into the ways of the world. He in consequence walked with a firm step to the presence of truth. He was however not a preacher. It looks as if he could at no time talk of himself or his experience. Only once does he appear in the first person in the fifth chapter of the first book as we now have it where he offers to narrate the story of the Ikshvākus. Even here he appears only in the first personal inflection of the verb not in the personal pronoun proper. After this he nowhere refers to himself nor implies his self even in a verbal form. A man like this may see many things but he will never proceed to preach. Valmiki besides saw life too fully to feel it as a bundle of facts. Such a man will not state the principles that he recovers from life. Valmiki saw life in its smallest details and felt impelled to describe it. In satisfying that impulse he composed *his poem*. *The principles that he perceived in life* became the life breath of his poem. Those who hear the poem and enjoy it accept unconsciously the principles which the poet saw. This is how a poet teaches. This teaching when the need arises influences

men without their knowing it. This, without doubt, should have been Valmiki's intention. He should have wished that the whole world might hear his poem and accept it and that, in consequence, that which he saw as the good himself might become the goal of all rational beings. The Ramayana, in the centuries that have passed since its composition, has influenced life over a large part of the world's surface. To that extent it has served its purpose. Yet a great part of its work is waiting to be done. Its teaching has to find acceptance over the greater part of the world. It is worth while stating what it is that the Ramayana would teach all mankind as it has so far taught the people of India.

#### FIRST ESSENTIAL

Two complexes in man's nature are the cause of all the sorrow in life. The first of these is the desire of property. Kowsalya suspected Kaikeyi because she came into power and lived as the favourite queen. Kaikeyi wished to be in a better position than Kowsalya, turned false to herself and, against her best conviction, prayed for Rama's exile in order that her son might be king. Vali lost his balance because his younger brother assumed the reins of government, imagining his elder brother dead, and pursued that younger brother almost to the point of death. Kaikeyi's love of position and Vali's love of kingship brought them grief. They brought suffering to hundreds and thousands around them. Rama could have claimed kingship, but he gave it up willingly and went into exile. Kingship came to Bharata unasked, but he was

unwilling to enjoy it. The younger brother begged the elder to take back the kingship. The elder insisted upon the younger keeping it for the period stipulated by his mother. Those who made a grab for property condemned themselves and others to endless sorrow and suffering. Those who willingly gave it up and asked others to have it grew in love and earned the admiration of the world. Kaikeyi no doubt realised soon after Bharata's return that she had made a mistake in asking for the kingship for him. In condemning Rama to exile she had without knowing it condemned Bharata also to exile for he would not enter Ayodhya till Rama returned. She was granted her wish that Rama should not rule but there ruled in his stead not Bharata as she had wished but Rama's footwear. Vali learnt his lesson only a moment before his death. In the story of Viswamitra reaching the highest stage of spiritual realisation we are told that he had to give up to a beggar a meal to which he had sat after six months of fast. If there is only one meal between two hungry persons the one who gives it up in favour of the other is the greater man. The love of property is essentially mean. It vitiates the social atmosphere. It lowers the individual's self respect. It makes havoc of friendship between nations. He who conquers desire for property conquers the hearts of his fellowmen. He is exalted above empires and is wise with the wisdom that belongs only to the sages.

#### SECOND ESSENTIAL

The second complex that leads man to trouble is sex desire. Dasaratha took many women and thus

set his life's boat adrift on the waters of tribulation. The royal sage who lost his heart to Menaka could gratify his desire only by abandoning his great purposes. The king of Lanka had known many women brought from all over the world for their beauty yet his lust remained awake as ever. When there was talk of another handsome woman he went after her. Dasaratha realised that his beautiful young wife was like a serpent in his clothes. Viswamitra could not rise in his realization until he turned away Rambha though she was divinely beautiful and the cuckoo called in the spring woods. Ahalya who gave her heart to Indra eried in haste and repented at leisure. The pleasure that comes of a wrong step, however real, is too short-lived. A man and woman pay for such pleasure too great a price. Rama, unlike his father, knew only one woman, but found in his married life a joy that the father could not have had from his three hundred and odd women. When near him, that wife was sufficient to Rama, when she was not near, the memory of her was sufficient. The mind should stand unwavering. It will stand unwavering if desire is kept under control. Except in this way man's heart can know no peace. "His desire being unconquered, he failed to have peace of mind."

### THEIR CURRENCY

These complexes are elemental and have grown with man's nature. They have been the cause of sorrow at all times of the sorrow of individuals, of the sorrow of societies, of the sorrow of nations. Valmiki saw them doing havoc to human life in his

time. He knew that they would continue to darken man's life in time to come. He stood up and called out to mankind both of his time and of the time to come to beware of the evil monsters in human nature. To us to day it looks as if this advice is old and almost as if it does not need communication. If the advice seems old to day that is due to Ashvini and his fellow ages having shouted it to mankind. The poet of the Ramayana was among the earliest to lay upon the principles that make human life unhappy and expose them to the world. It must also be said that old as the lesson is mankind has still to learn it. The race can make no progress in the education of the spirit till this simple lesson is fully mastered. That the lesson has not been mastered is clear from the way of the world's life at the present time. All the toil and tribulation between community and community, between people and people, between the followers of one religion and the followers of another have their basis in desire for power, for prestige and for position. The great war of the Mahabharata arose from this cause. The Great War of Europe of a quarter of a century ago arose for a similar cause. Its supplement which is raging to day has the same origin. Italy invaded Abyssinia and Japan is trying to swallow up China from this cause. The Bishop of D allowed the escaped convict to take his candle sticks and solved the convict's problem of property and won his soul to God. By refusing a kingdom Rama and Bharata solved the same problem in human nature centuries ago. It is true that self denial may not always produce the



same result. It may meet selfishness on the other side, but whatever the reaction on the side of lower nature to man's higher nature, the higher nature has only this course open. It may, after all the sacrifice it makes, get nothing more than exile for itself. That would be because the race itself has not progressed sufficiently to respond properly to self-sacrifice.

Desire for the possession of man's or woman's body may not appear to be creating the same problems to-day as in the past. A war for rescuing a woman has not arisen in the last one thousand years as wars did on account of Helen and Sita. But Society has never been free from disturbance on this account. Men and women in one village and another are still slain for this reason, and man's hand is red with the blood of man or woman, and woman's eyes are turning to tears for this sorrow. Apart from the obvious advice that the human being should keep sex desire under control there is in Valmiki's poem another suggestion not so obvious but equally definite. That suggestion is that neither man nor woman should own the body of another by force. The essence of pleasure and companionship between the sexes comes from the mingling of hearts. He who would force a woman's inclination is a *Rakshasa*, a demon, she who would force the inclinations of a man is a *Rakshasi*, a demoness. He who does not force but takes advantage of the helplessness of a woman in his power is a *Vanara*, a kind of man. Where the *Rakshasa* forces strangers, this man, who is only a kind of man, fouls his own nest. Even a husband ought not to use his wife's person if she does not share

desire with him. Society may have assigned a man and a woman to each other but the condition is implicit that they agree to the arrangement. If they themselves do not agree the contract made by society does not hold. Desisting from a claim based merely on social sanction would make for untold peace and happiness in the home. Attraction between the sexes is to day a drag on human progress. The race has not yet passed the stage of the brute. Realisation of the higher pleasure that comes from willing companionship would lead man to the practice of the higher principles of sex relationship recommended by Valmiki and make what now is mere lust into the most powerful lever for the soul's uplift and for the emancipation of the race.

#### DIRECTION OF PROGRESS

Emancipation and uplift of soul are what Valmiki desired for mankind. After an early stage of pristine simplicity mankind began its journey in civilization. It looks as if man began with sterling trying to get for nothing what another had made with labour. From this state the race progressed to the state of saying that they shall take who have the power and they should keep who can. A further stage was reached after some experience and man to day says as a rule keep what is yours. The further stage is that of saying you are welcome to what is mine. When the race has learnt this lesson at it has learnt earlier lessons man will have become God. Valmiki and his like are telling mankind that there is this fourth step in the progress of the race.

These are for the race what the moral nature and conscience are in the individual. They see for the race and aspire, and judge the race, not as persons from outside, but as its conscience. We need the voice of Valmiki as the conscience of mankind. If this lesson were taught in the name of a religion, another religion would not teach it to its followers. It would wish to be itself and not to learn from a compeer. Taught as the word of a poet, the message should find acceptance all over the world. Poetry begins its work where religion stops. It leads mankind from the slopes to which religion has brought it to the crown of its achievement. It is hereafter the task of poetry to emancipate mankind. It is poetry that, in the coming age, will save man's soul.

### INDIA'S MISSION

Valmiki and his poem have thus a great mission to fulfil in the world. What the Ramayana has done in the last two thousand years and more in India it has to do in the world hereafter. To take the Ramayana to the rest of the world, while holding fast to its teachings itself, is the work that India has to do. Valmiki, as a great teacher, has influenced Indian society deeply so far. To reflect the influence of the teaching more vividly than hitherto is the best way in which Indian society can show the world how valuable is the teaching of the poet. That teaching is not easy to practise. In days of loss and depression, when patience with opponents seems to bring one nothing better than exile and destitution, people, very naturally, question if patience is the right article

Indians see the West enjoy more comfort and contrasting with that comfort the poverty and suffering of their own people are likely to doubt if Valmiki's prescription is the right one. They see also many evils in Indian society and would get rid of them with all possible speed. To smash up one evil or two evils and think that we have saved the people would be like Angada killing a fearful looking person on this side of the sea and thinking that he had killed Ravana. After this incident Hanuman had to cross the ocean and reach Lanka discover Sita there and bring news of her to Rama and Rama had to go with the monkey hordes and slay Ravana to rescue Sita. Rescuing a nation's soul is not a matter of removing one or two evils nor is it the work of one or two youthful enthusiasts. It is work in which all have to co-operate the old as well as the young. It implies a search for the highest good and determining where it is and how it is to be got. It requires the leadership of the best and the highest in the nation and camp following on the part of even the greatest of heroic youth. This highest good is also not easy to see. Indians to day see good in terms of Western achievement they have lost their heart to the beauty of Western civilization much as Sita lost her heart to the golden deer. How bright how beautiful is its face! We send our soul in pursuit of it and wish to have it as Sita did the golden deer dead if not alive. The beauty and brightness to which we lose our hearts are however illusion even if not illusion they cannot be ours. We may be prepared to own them dead and press the pursuit but what we

shall get for all our trouble is only a monster's corpse. Evil in Indian society to-day should not make its wise men question the fundamentals of this civilization. Apparent beauty in another civilization should not lead them to believe in the fundamentals of that civilization rather than of this one. The evil in Indian life proves that something has to be done to improve that life, but that something has to be evolved from within by thought and by pursuing India's natural bent in growth.

### PHILOSOPHY OF ACTION

The advice that man should not fight for property nor think of woman as an article of pleasure to be owned and possessed should not be understood as merely an endorsement of the unhealthy quiescence and passive renunciation that are believed to be characteristic of the Indian people. Occasionally in the Ramayana we do get an echo of this philosophy of despair, as when Sita, in the hour of her deepest sorrow, says that the ascetics who have no desire and who know not the pleasant and the unpleasant are happy and have the best wealth, but this is an expression of the mood and the moment. The true note of Sita's attitude in life is the one expressed in the proverb which she commends as borne out in her life. "Let man live, his good will come to him, even should it be after a hundred years." Bharata repeats this proverb when he hears that Rama is returning. This was the outlook in life that Valmiki approved. Flying from life as a source of trouble, rejecting the pleasant along with the

unpleasant was not an ideal which Valmiki accepted. Great both with calmness he said. Told to go to the forest Rama showed no sign of distress. Asked to return to Ayodhya and become king before the stipulated period of exile was over he showed no eagerness. Bharata wondered at his equanimity and his indifference to gain and loss. To give up gain for fear of loss is not renunciation but poltroonery. In the last analysis it is self seeking masquerading as renunciation. Man fulfils the law of his being by refusing self seeking even in this covert form and enduring loss as well as gain and enduring them for the sake of others. Nor should man merely because he endures pain ask others to endure it and tell them it is an illusion. Rama felt no distress when condemned to exile but this was on his own account. When he thought of the disappointment to his mother and to his wife he felt greatly unhappy. If man thinks that another's pain is illusion he is likely to think that joy also is illusion and there would be no real reason why he should work for any one's satisfaction. He might leave evil in life unfought and cease to distinguish between what is good and what is not. Valmiki would have none of these positions in the good man's life. There is in life both good and evil. The good should not accept the evil as a necessary part of existence. If what is evil acknowledges the superiority of good and is willing to reform it might be suffered and given a chance but if it persists it has to be quelled and replaced by good. Rama had no option but to fight the *Rakshasa* hordes and slay Ravana. He might not need kingship for himself.

he might prefer to be in exile, but when the sages in the outermost confines of his father's kingdom needed his protection he had to give it to them. If his friend's wife was appropriated by that friend's brother, he had to slay that brother and restore to his friend his kingdom and his wife. If she whom he loved was carried away by a ruffian, he had to make war to rescue his beloved. The heroic man does not become an exile from power to be free from responsibility. Whether on the throne or out of it, his burden is his own. No one else can carry it. On the throne, he may have some comfort along with the toil of kingship, off the throne he is free of the comfort, not the toil. Just as he went into exile willingly, Rama walked into power willingly. As there is a greatness in renunciation there is a greatness in acceptance. In either case greatness comes from outlook. Renunciation as well as acceptance may proceed from selfishness. Acceptance as well as renunciation may proceed from selfless desire to serve others. To love position for one's comfort would be smallness. But to seek solitude to secure peace for one's self would be equally small. A man may be king and yet not be thinking of the comforts of kingship but rather of its duties. He then secures in the midst of plenty the peace of soul that comes only of real renunciation. It is the outlook that makes acceptance or renunciation great or small. Valmiki's teaching became the basis for the school of thought that, later, took perfect shape in the *Bhagavad Gita*.

## XV THE GOOD AND THE SACRED

ALL this while the Ramayana has been spoken of as a poem. There is however no intention to suggest that those who received it as a religious book made a mistake. All noble and great speech takes birth to save man. We do not err when we treat such speech as religious text or those who speak it as teachers of religion. Only he who worships such speech and such teachers in the name of his religion should not deny or give up other good speech or great teachers. Man for convenience of living holds one person as teacher, one book as the bible and one country as motherland. The man who treats the Ramayana as a poem also should have no quarrel with him who treats it as a religious text. That the latter attitude led to some good is clear. The whole population read the poem day after day and treated a palm leaf manuscript of it as valuable property. When the members of a household divided its possessions into shares in a partition, house and land were taken as one share and the volume of the Ramayana which the father had used for his reading in worship day after day was treated as another share. When a house caught fire and things were saved, the household copy of the Ramayana was among the first articles to be brought out from the house. Cloth and grain were left to burn but not the Ramayana. When a man away from home felt that he was dying, he asked his wife and son to send for the Ramayana which he had left



at home and to look after it. Other things seemed to him of less consequence. That the poem deserved all this reverence is apparent to anyone who realises how it affected the life of its readers. "Cheerfulness", says the poet, "saves man, sorrow breaks him." It would be hard to tell how many persons felt the power of this advice and endured sorrow and tried to look at life cheerfully. "Let man live, good will come to him, should he have to wait a hundred years" is another statement that made men face all the tribulations of life with unfailing courage. It is the war cry of man's unconquerable spirit. "There is not one in Sugriva's presence smaller than I" said Hanuman whom the world knew as the greatest of Sugriva's servants. In saying this he set a standard of good sense for men of ability which is eternally valid. "Who is there that does not make mistakes? However wicked a person may be, good men should show him only pity" said the injured Sita, prescribing for those who would be good a law of magnanimity and forgiveness that mankind can never excel. "The good do not hurt him who hurts: the proper thing is to help" Sita's words raise hope in man's heart that the power that presides over life, as it is the best, should also be the most merciful possible. "A man has to say but once that he is mine. It is thereafter my business to protect him from all harm" said Rama. The power presiding over life, to make a great soul speak in this manner, should be both almighty and ever ready to help the helpless. These great texts played on the mind of generations through the centuries and gave their life a direction and impetus that

ensured peace of mind and happiness and enterprise in action

Similarly Rama and Sita are in the life of the people who revere them ideals that are constantly shaping outlook and conduct. Some may hold them as God, others may hold them as merely noble man and noble woman. What after all is the attitude of the rationalist in such a matter? He either denies the postulate that there is a God, or he believes that God should be something different from these ideal persons. If a person who does not accept the postulate of deity would only define to himself the ideal which he would prescribe for man, he would find that Rama either reaches the standard of that ideal or approaches it. He who may be willing to postulate God but thinks that it should be something different from Rama should make a picture of that different something; he would find that his ideal and Valmiki's hero have far more in common than he imagines. Some there will no doubt be who postulate God but would say that it is not possible to make a picture of him. To such persons one may make a request for patience with persons with a different type of mind. An advanced mind can think of God in the abstract. Minds not so advanced seem to need something concrete to hold to. They make symbols of deity or take something ready to hand as such symbol. Valmiki's conception of the magnanimous hero may well seem to various types of men the culmination of man's aspiration to goodness. Men who do not need symbols need not accept this symbol, but they need not deny its validity to others. If there should

be persons who would have a symbol but do not think Valmiki's ideal sufficiently good, let them make another ideal for themselves or improve upon Valmiki. What man needs is an ideal. He may call it God or only man. Difference of nomenclature makes no difference in the substance. The ideal is that to which the race has to rise and all great poetry tries to prescribe this ideal. For this reason too, all great poetry is sacred and constitutes mankind's bible and all nobility in man is divine and constitutes godliness. Those who wish to do so may hold Rama as God and treat the Ramayana as a bible. They would be right. So also would others who would not agree to do this but treat the book as a great poem and the hero as only a great man.

## XVI SALUTATION TO THE POET

THIS appreciation of the Ramayana began with the statement that the poem was first among Indian poems, not merely in order of time but also in order of merit. All that has been stated in subsequent sections is merely an explanation of this sentiment. It is nothing new to say that Valmiki is a great poet. Yet in the multifarious activities of a new time and the multitudinous literature of all the countries of the world flying amidst the population of India at the present day, there is a grave risk of Valmiki receding from our life. Lovers of literature in the past spoke in generous praise of Valmiki's work. One of them

referred to his euphonious style and his graceful sentences. He or another spoke of this great river of the Ramayana which purified the world. Rama who was fortunate in the temperament with which he was born in those brothers in that wife and those servants had the crown, the fortune of having his story told by Valmiki. The crown of appreciation that Valmiki set on Rama's head brings honour to India to-day. Indian youth educated in the modern way may value Shakespeare and Milton and Voltaire and Tolstoy as high as ever it likes but it ought not to neglect Valmiki. However contrary the indications at present may be it is not likely that it will neglect him. If for no other reason Valmiki deserves attention for being one of the few names in Indian history who have won respect for India from the world. Will you have rather your Indian empire or your Shakespeare asked Carlyle imagining a situation and said that he would rather give up the Indian empire than Shakespeare. Indians have no empire to lose they have only Valmiki and his like. It cannot be that they are prepared to throw away the only thing of which they can be proud. Valmiki indeed is one of the sources of India's hope for the future. His large heart open mind deep vision and rich utterance came from this population. Something like them is no doubt still there in its constitution. It is finding expression in various lives at various times and is giving us continued proof of persistence. It has to take shape again and again in the life of this people in future. No other poem in the world to-day has the place that the Ramayana holds in Indian life. No civilization

in the world to-day is as ancient as that of India and, for all the dust in which it has been dragged, as fresh. There is in the world to-day no poem as ancient as the Ramayana which expounds the living tradition of a living people. Valmiki's position in letters is unique, as India's position is in the world. Valmiki is the poet cuckoo of the Religion of Humanity. The concluding verses of the Ramayana tell us that when Rama was reigning, his people loved to repeat his name. Generations have felt the same joy in repeating the name and still the praise of Rama resounds and is giving joy. The Ramayana, as one who loved it said, is a poem for eternity, it should gain currency in all the worlds and endure as long as the everlasting hills and the deathless streams. More and more as the years pass, men will know its poet as prince of poets and master and elder. The more the world realizes this the more good will it attain. To Valmiki the cuckoo, seated on the branches of the tree of poesy and calling Rama, Rama, in sweet and mellifluent notes, let the world do reverence.

## APPENDIX

*Extracts relating to some opinions of Western  
scholars referred to in the book*

### I

(Expansion and Interpolations See pages 14 to 20)

†As Professor Jacobi shows all these additions to the original body of the epic have been for the most part so loosely attached that the junctures are easy to recognise They are however pervaded by the same spirit as the other part There is therefore no reason for the supposition that they are due to a Brahmin revision intended to transform a poem originally meant from the warrior caste They seem rather to owe their origin simply to the desire of professional rhapsodists to meet the demands of the popular taste ) (Page 304 *Sanskrit Literature* A A Macdonnell )

According to Professor Lassen the development of the story of Rama may be divided into four stages The first construction of the poem did not carry the narrative beyond the banishment of Rama to the Himalaya and the circumstances which caused his wife Sita and his brother Lakshmana to follow him into exile The second changed the place of banishment to the Godavari and described the protection afforded to the hermits against the attacks of the aborigines The third embraced the account of the first attempts to subdue the inhabitants of the Dekkan The fourth amplification which resulted from the knowledge

gained by the Hindus of the Island of Ceylon, included the description of Rama's expedition against Lanka ! (Page 339, *Indian Wisdom*, Monier-Williams )

## II

(Relation to Buddhism in time and matter

See pages 242, 243, 247 and 248 )

The only mention of Buddha in the Ramayana occurs in a passage which is evidently interpolated Hence the balance of the evidence in relation to Buddhism seems to favour the pre-Buddhistic origin of the genuine Ramayana (Page 307, *Sanskrit Literature*, A A Macdonnell )

Another question is whether traces of Buddhism can be proved in the Ramayana It can probably be answered with an absolute negative, for the only place in which the Buddha is mentioned (see above p 486, note 2) is decidedly spurious However, there may be one, though very distant, relation to Buddhism (Page 509, *Indian Literature*, Vol I, Winternitz )

There are no obvious traces of Buddhism to be seen in the Ramayana, but the characterisation of Rama may possibly be traceable to remote Buddhist influence (Page 516, *Indian Literature*, Vol I, Winternitz )

## III

(Greek influence or example See pages 243 and 248 )

Professor Weber's assumption of Greek influence in the story of the Ramayana seems to lack foundation (Page 307, *Sanskrit Literature*, A A Macdonnell )

The circumstance that the ancient poem already served as a model for Asvaghosha and hence must have been composed long before the time of the latter agrees well with the entire absence in the old and genuine Ramayana of any traces of Greek influence or of an acquaintance with the Greeks. For two allusions to the *Yavanas* (Ionians Greeks) have been proved to be spurious. And it is quite out of the question that as was once suggested by Weber the Homeric poems should have had any sort of influence on Valmiki's composition. There is not even a remote similarity between the stealing of Sita and the rape of Helen between the advance on Lanka and that on Troy and only a very remote similarity of motive between the bending of the bow by Rama and that by Ulysses. (Page 514 *Indian Literature* Vol I Winternitz)

There can be no question of Greek influence in the Ramayana and the genuine Ramayana betrays no acquaintance with the Greeks. (Page 516 *Indian Literature* Vol I Winternitz)

The Greek writer Dion Chrysostomos who was born about the middle of the first century and was especially honoured by the emperor Trajan mentions (Or. LIII 555) that records existed in his time of epic poems recited by the Hindus which had been copied or translated from Homer. These statements as Professor Lassen has shown (*Ind Alt* III 346) must have been taken from the accounts of Megasthenes who lived at the court of Chandra Gupta (see note 1 p 224). They indicate that poems resembling the *Iliad* were current in India at least as early as



the third or fourth century B C , though it by no means follows that the Hindu poets borrowed a single idea from Homer

There seems too great a disposition among European scholars to regard the Hindus as destitute of all originality I cannot but agree with Professor Lassen that Megasthenes was mistaken (Page 313, *Indian Wisdom*, Monier-Williams )

But these comparisons cannot be carried out to any extent without encountering difficulties at every step so that any theory of an interchange of ideas between Hindu and Greek epic poets becomes untenable (Page 426, *Indian Wisdom*, Monier-Williams )

#### IV

(Priority in time as between the Ramayana and the Mahabharata See pages 243 and 247 )

In Book III (Cantos 277-91) of the latter epic (the Mahabharata) moreover there is a Ramopakhyana, and it contains several verses agreeing more or less with Valmiki's lines, and its author presupposes on the part of his audience a knowledge of the Ramayana as represented by the Bombay recension (Page 306, *Sanskrit Literature*, A A Macdonnell )

All these facts justify our agreeing with Jacobi (*loc cit*, p 71) when he says that the Ramayana must already "have been generally familiar as an ancient work, before the Mahabharata had reached its final form" (Page 503, *Indian Literature*, Vol I, Winternitz )

Hence the Ramayana is in some respects a more finished composition than the Mahabharata and depicts a more polished state of society and a more advanced civilization (Page 417 *Indian Wisdom* Monier Williams)

## V

(The time of the Ramayana See pages 247 and 248)

We know from the statements of Megasthenes preserved in Strabo and Diodorus that the worship of Vishnu in his heroic incarnations prevailed in Hindustan about three hundred years before Christ (See note p 276) (Page 318 *Indian Wisdom* Monier Williams)

We may probably argue that the Ramayana came into being at a time when Buddhism had already spread in Eastern India and the Buddhist Canon was in course of formation (Page 510 *Indian Literature* Vol I Winternitz)

As early as in the second half of the first century A D the Jain Monk Vimala Suri recast the Rama legend in his Prakrit poem Paumacariya (*Padma-charita*) bringing it into line with the religion and philosophy of the Jains (Page 513 *Indian Literature* Vol I Winternitz)

It is probable that the original Ramayan was composed in the third century B C by Valmiki on the basis of ancient ballads (Page 517 *Indian Literature* Vol I Winternitz)

These points seem to merit consideration in fixing 500 B C as an approximate date for the first pre Brahminical and pre Buddhistic versions of the



Homer It should be observed moreover that the diction of the Indian epics is more polished regular and cultivated and the language altogether in a more advanced stage of development than that of Homer This of course tells to the disadvantage of the style on the side of nervous force and vigour and it must be admitted that in the Sanskrit poems there is a great redundancy of epithet too liberal a use of metaphor simile and hyperbole and far too much repetition amplification and prolixity (Page 422 *Indian Wisdom* Monier Williams)

Yet there are not wanting indications in the Indian Epics of a higher degree of civilization than that represented in the Homeric poems The battle fields of the Ramayana and Mahabharata though spoiled by childish exaggerations and the use of supernatural weapons are not made barbarous by wanton cruelties and the descriptions of Ayodhya and Lanka imply far greater luxury and refinement than those of Sparta and Troy (Page 424 *Indian Wisdom* Monier Williams)

No one too can read either the Ramayana or Mahabharata without feeling that they rise above the Homeric poems in this that a deep religious meaning appears to underlie all the narrative and that the wildest allegory may be intended to conceal a sublime moral symbolizing the conflict between good and evil and teaching the hopelessness of victory in so terrible a contest without purity of soul self abnegation and subjugation of the passions

In reality it is the religious element of the Indian Epics that constitutes one of the principal

features of contrast in comparing them with the Homeric (Page 427, *Indian Wisdom*, Monier-Williams)

In fact, it is not merely in a confused, exaggerated, and overgrown mythology that the difference between the Indian and Grecian Epics lies. It is in the injudicious and excessive use of it. In the Ramayana and Mahabharata, the spiritual and the supernatural are everywhere so dominant and overpowering, that anything merely human seems altogether out of place. (Page 432, *Indian Wisdom*, Monier-Williams)

Above all, although priests are occasionally mentioned in the Iliad and the Odyssey, there is wholly wanting in the Homeric poems any recognition of a regular hierarchy, or the necessity for a mediatorial caste of sacrificers. This, which may be called the sacerdotal element of the Indian Epics, is more or less woven into their very tissue. Brahminism has been at work in these productions almost as much as the imagination of the poet, and boldly claiming a monopoly of all knowledge, human and divine, has appropriated this, as it has every other department of literature and warped it to its own purposes. (Page 433, *Indian Wisdom*, Monier-Williams)

It must be admitted, however, that in exhibiting pictures of domestic life and manners the Sanskrit Epics are even more true and real than the Greek and Roman. In the delineation of women the Hindu poet throws aside all exaggerated colouring, and draws from nature. Kaikeyi, Kowsalya, Mandodari (the favourite wife of Ravana) and even the hump-

bricked Manthara (*Ramayana* II 11) are all drawn to the very life Sita Droupadi and Damayanti engage our affections and our interest far more than Helen or even than Penelope (Page 437 *Indian Wisdom* Monier Williams)

Indeed in depicting scenes of domestic affection and expressing those universal feelings and emotions which belong to human nature in all time and in all places Sanskrit epic poetry is unrivalled even by Greek epics (Page 440 *Indian Wisdom* Monier Williams)

How far more natural is Achilles with all his faults than Rama with his almost painful correctness of conduct (Page 435 *Indian Wisdom* Monier Williams)

Notwithstanding the wilderness of exaggeration and hyperbole through which the reader of the Indian Epics has occasionally to wander there are in the whole range of the world's literature few more charming poems than the *Ramayana*. The classical purity clearness and simplicity of its style the exquisite touches of true poetic feeling with which it abounds its graphic descriptions of heroic incidents and nature's grandest scenes the deep acquaintance it displays with the conflicting workings and most refined emotions of the human heart all entitle it to rank among the most beautiful compositions that have appeared at any period or in any country (Page 363 *Indian Wisdom* Monier Williams)

And if a comparison between the Indian and the Greek Epics with reference to artistic value must necessarily result unfavourably for the former the blame rests far more with those versifiers who

increased and disfigured the ancient songs with their own additions and alterations, than with the ancient Indian poets. The 'formless fermenting verbiage,' with which Friedrich Ruckert reproaches the Ramayana is surely more often to be placed to the account of the imitators of Valmiki than to that of Valmiki himself. But on the whole the German poet is probably right when he sees the beauty of the Indian epic elsewhere than that of the Greek, saying

"Such fantastic gramaces, such formless fermenting verbiage

As Ramayana offers thee that has Homer

Certainly taught thee to despise, but yet such lofty thoughts

And such deep feeling the Iliad does not show thee"

(Page 500, *Indian Literature*, Vol. I, Winternitz)

*By the Same Author*

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